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THIRTIETH THOUSAND.

LONDON :

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CONTENTS.

	Page
THE LITTLE OLD MAN OF BATIGNOLLES	5
THE MATRIMONIAL AMBASSADOR - - - - -	53
LOVE OR WEALTH? - - - - -	129
MISSING - - - - -	167
THAT UNFORTUNATE HOUSE - - - - -	181
THE SEMINARY - - - - -	191

THE LITTLE OLD MAN OF BATIGNOLLES:

A CHAPTER OF A DETECTIVE'S MEMOIRS.

J. B. CASIMIR GODEUIL.

SOME years ago a man dressed in black, and apparently in the prime of life, presented himself at the office of the popular Parisian newspaper, "*Le Petit Journal*," bringing with him a manuscript of such exquisite penmanship that even Brard, the prince of caligraphic artists, would have deemed it worthy of his talent. "I will call again in a fortnight," said the stranger, "to know what you think of my work."

The manuscript, like many and many of its predecessors, was at once stored away in a box labelled, "MS. to be read," without the editor, the reader, or any of the staff evincing the least curiosity concerning its contents. Time passed by, and its author failed to return; but at last the reader was in duty bound compelled to glance through the box's contents, and one day, strange to relate, he burst into the office with a beaming face. "I have just read something most extraordinary," said he; "the manuscript which that strange looking fellow in black left with us, and without joking it is really a clever performance." Now the readers attached to publishing firms or newspaper offices are not as a rule enthusiastic beings: rather the reverse, for they spend their lives wading through pages and pages of trash, and penning the laconic mention, "Declined with thanks" on the margin of amateur copy. Thus when the reader of the *Petit Journal* expressed such a high opinion of the manuscript in question a general expression of surprise escaped the various regular contributors who were present. But with unabated fervour he cut all controversy short by throwing the manuscript on the table, and exclaiming: "You doubt me, gentlemen? Well read it, your selves,"

This sufficed to kindle curiosity. One of the writers on the paper immediately put the MS. in his pocket, and when by the end of the week it had made the round of the staff, there was but one opinion: "The *Petit Journal* must publish it."

At this point, however, an unforeseen difficulty arose. The manuscript bore no author's name. The man in black had merely left with it a card, on which was inscribed, "J. B. Casimir Godeuil," without

any address. What was to be done? Was the MS. to be published anonymously? That was scarcely practicable at an epoch when the French press laws required each printed line to be signed by a responsible person. Besides was it certain that M. J. B. Casimir Godeuil was the author? Might he not have presented the manuscript on a friend's behalf? To decide this point the only course was to find him, and inquiries were forthwith instituted in all directions, but unfortunately without result. No one had seemingly ever heard of such a being as J. B. Casimir Godeuil.

Then it was, that all Paris was placarded with gigantic bills asking for information concerning M. Godeuil's whereabouts. The walls of Lyons, Marseilles, and other large cities were similarly posted, and during a whole week folks asked themselves "Who can this man Godeuil be?" Several opined that he was some prodigal son, whose return to the parental roof was anxiously hoped for; others suggested that he must be the lost heir to some princely fortune; whilst others again surmised that he might be a dishonest cashier, who had absconded with the contents of his employer's strong box. But, in the meanwhile, the manager of the *Petit Journal* had attained his object. Scarcely were the first bills posted when M. J. B. Casimir Godeuil hastened in person to the office of the paper and made all necessary arrangements for the publication of his narrative: "THE LITTLE OLD MAN OF BATIGNOLLES," which constituted, he said, the first part of his memoirs. He, moreover, promised to bring other fragments of his autobiography, but in this respect he failed to keep his word, and all subsequent efforts to find him again proved unsuccessful. The following narrative (complete in itself), is therefore his only published work, but with the view of throwing some light on the author's character and object we have decided to print the subjoined preface, written by himself, and which was to have served for the whole series of his memoirs:

PREFACE.

A prisoner had just been brought before an investigating magistrate, and despite his denials, his stratagems and an alleged *alibi*, it had been shown that he was guilty both of forgery and theft. Conquered by the evidence I had collected against him, he confessed his crimes, exclaiming: "Ah! If I had only known the true power of the police and how difficult it is to escape its search, I should have remained an honest man."

These words inspired me with the idea of writing my memoirs. Was it not advisable that every one should be made acquainted with the true state of affairs? Would not my revelations have a beneficial effect? Might I not strip crime of the poetry of romance and shew it as it really is: cowardly and ignoble, abject and repulsive? Would it not be useful to prove that the most wretched beings in the world, are the madmen who declare war against society? And that is what I propose doing. I will prove that everyone has an immediate, positive, mathematical interest in remaining honest—I will show that, with our social organisation, with the railroad and the electric telegraph, impunity is

virtually impossible. Punishment may be deferred, but it always comes at last. And profiting by what I write, many misguided beings may reflect before allowing themselves to slide along the road of crime. Many, whom the faint murmurings of conscience would have failed to influence, may be arrested in their course by the voice of fear.

Need I speak of the nature of these memoirs? They will describe the struggles, efforts, defeats, and victories of the few devoted men to whom the security of the Parisians is virtually entrusted. To cope with all the criminals of a city, which, with its suburbs, numbers more than three millions of inhabitants, there are but two hundred detectives at the disposal of the Prefecture of Police. It is to them that I dedicate this narrative.

I.

WHEN I was completing my studies, in hopes of one day becoming a medical man—it was in the good old times when I was but three and twenty—I lived in the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince, almost at the corner of the Rue Racine. For thirty francs a month, service included, I rented a furnished room, which would cost more than three times as much now-a-days, a room of such vast proportions that I was really able to stretch out my arms when putting on my coat, without having to open the window. I rose early and I went home late; for in the morning I had my hospital to “walk,” and at night time the Café Leroy possessed a seductive attraction which I was powerless to resist. Thus, it happened, that with one exception, the other dwellers in the house—mostly quiet people, living either by trade or on their incomes—were scarcely known to me, even by sight. The person I have excepted from the others was a man of medium height, with a clean shaven face, and common-place features, whom every one always deferentially called “Monsieur” Méchinot. The doorkeeper treated him with the most profound respect, and invariably took off his cap whenever he perceived him. M. Méchinot lived on the same floor as myself; in fact his door was just opposite mine, and on several occasions we had encountered each other on the landing. As a matter of course, we bowed to one another, whenever this happened, but for some time our acquaintance was confined to these rudimentary tokens of civility. One night, however, M. Méchinot knocked at my door to ask me to oblige him with a few lucifers; another night I borrowed some tobacco from him, and one morning we happened to leave the house at the same time and walked together down the street exchanging the usual commonplace remarks about the weather. Such was the commencement of our connection.

Although I was neither inquisitive nor suspicious—a man is seldom so at three and twenty—I nevertheless liked to know what sort of people I had to deal with, and without prying into my neighbour's life I naturally asked myself: “Who is he? what is his profession?” I knew that he was married, and to all appearances worshipped by his wife, a plump little body with fair hair, and a smiling face; and yet it seemed to me that he was a man of most irregular habits, for he would frequently leave the house before daybreak, and I often heard him come

home during the small hours of the morning, after being out all night. Moreover, every now and then he would absent himself for weeks at a time—and I could not understand how pretty little Madame Méchinét could put up with such strange behaviour, and indeed show herself so loving towards a husband of such a roaming disposition. In my perplexity I bethought myself of the doorkeeper, who, under ordinary circumstances, was as garrulous as a magpie, and who, I conjectured, would readily give me the information I desired. But I made a great mistake; for scarcely had I mentioned the name of Méchinét to him, than he sent me about my business in fine style, fiercely rolling his eyes and indignantly declaring that he was not in the habit of “spying” the tenants of the house. This unwonted reception on the doorkeeper’s part so fanned my curiosity, that dismissing all restraint I began to watch my neighbour in earnest.

I soon made certain discoveries which seemed to me of a most ominous character. One day I saw him come home dressed in the latest fashion, with the ribbon of the Legion of Honour displayed in his button-hole, and a couple of mornings later I met him on the stairs wearing a dirty blouse and a ragged cap, which gave him a most villainous appearance. And this was not everything, for one afternoon, just as he was going out, I perceived his wife take leave of him on the landing and kiss him with passionate fondness, exclaiming: “Take care, my dear, be prudent, think of your little wife at home.” “Be prudent,” indeed! Why was he to be prudent? What did this all mean? Was the wife the husband’s accomplice in all these strange goings on? After this incident I was fairly stupefied, but there was even yet more to come.

One night I was in bed, asleep and dreaming. Fancy had carried me back to the Café Leroy, which I had left a few hours previously, and I was apparently absorbed in watching a most interesting game of billiards. The ivory balls sped right and left over the green baize, now striking the bands, and now cannoning with wonderful precision and effect. One thing surprised me, that whenever they came into contact there was a loud report, and at last, indeed, there was such a constant succession of cannons and clashes that I fairly started and woke up. The problem was instantaneously explained to me. What I had taken for the clashing of the billiard balls was a loud and repeated rat-tat-tat outside my room. I immediately sprang out of bed to ascertain what was the matter, and, to my surprise, as soon as I had opened the door, who should rush in but my mysterious neighbour, Méchinét, with his clothes in tatters, his shirt-front torn apart, but a wisp of his necktie left him, his head bare, and, to complete the picture, his face besmeared with blood. “Good heavens!” cried I, in affright, “what has happened?”

“Speak lower! you might be heard,” rejoined my neighbour with an imperious wave of the hand. “This wound of mine in the face may be nothing after all, but it smarts terribly, and I thought you might be able to dress it, as you are a medical student.”

Without another word I made him sit down, and examined the wound he spoke of. As he had surmised, it was not serious, although it bled profusely. In point of fact, the skin of his left cheek was grazed from ear to mouth, and at different points the flesh was bare. As soon as I

had washed the cheek and dressed it, M. Méchainet warmly tendered me his acknowledgments. "Well, I've escaped without much harm after all," said he. "Many thanks, M. Godeuil, I'm greatly obliged to you. Pray don't mention this little accident . . . to any one. Forgive me for disturbing you, and now, good-night!"

Good-night, indeed! As if I could sleep in peace after such an adventure. My mind was haunted with all manner of strange ideas. It was plain enough now that this man Méchainet must be a highway-robber or a burglar, possibly a cut throat, and, at all events, a villain of the deepest dye. However, he quietly called on me the next day, thanked me over again, and, to my surprise, wound up by inviting me to dinner. Such courteous behaviour was scarcely in keeping with the character I had assigned to him, and more puzzled than ever I decided to accept his invitation, hoping that it might lead to some explanation of the mystery. I was, indeed, all eyes and ears on entering my neighbour's lodgings; but, despite the most minute scrutiny and patient attention, I neither saw nor heard anything at all of a nature to enlighten me.

Still, it happened that after this dinner our acquaintance considerably improved. M. Méchainet seemed anxious to cultivate my friendship. Every now and then he would invite me to take "pot luck" with himself and his wife, and nearly every afternoon, during "the hour of absinthe," he would join me at the Café Leroy, where we habitually indulged in a game of dominoes pending dinner-time. One afternoon, in the month of July, between five and six o'clock, while we were thus engaged at the café, an ill-clad, suspicious-looking individual hurried in, and approaching my neighbour, whispered something, which I failed to master, in his ear. M. Méchainet immediately sprang to his feet with a pale face. "I'm coming!" said he. "Run and tell them I'm coming;" whereupon the messenger started off as fast as his legs could carry him. Then turning to me, and holding out his hand, my neighbour remarked: "Please excuse me, M. Godeuil, but duty before everything, you know; I must leave now, but we will resume our game to-morrow."

All aglow with curiosity, and particularly struck by his air of excitement, I could not conceal the vexation his abrupt departure caused me; and still actuated by anxiety to penetrate the seeming mystery, I made so bold as to say that I felt sorry I was not to accompany him. "Eh?" he retorted; "well, after all, why not? *Will* you come? It may be interesting?" I was too delighted and impatient to waste time in exchanging superfluous words, so that my only answer was to put on my hat and follow him out of the café.

II.

IN accompanying M. Méchainet, I was certainly far from thinking that such a simple act would have a most decisive influence on my own after-life. "Well, now, I shall know what this all means," I murmured to myself, as puffed up with puerile satisfaction I trotted down the Rue Racine in my neighbour's wake. I use the word "trotted" advisedly, for in truth I had great difficulty in keeping pace with my companion, who rushed on, pushing the passers-by out of his way with a strange air

of authority, and making such rapid strides that one might have imagined his fortune depended on his legs.

Just as we reached the Place de l'Odéon, an empty cab drove by. "Eh, cabman, stop!" cried M. Méchainet, and opening one of the doors he bade me get into the vehicle. "Drive as fast as you can to 39 Rue de Lécluse, at Batignolles," he added, speaking to the Jehu, and then with a bound he reached my side. The distance made the driver swear, but cutting his thin horse with a vigorous stroke of the whip he turned him in the right direction, and we rolled off, down towards the Seine.

"Ah! so we are going to Batignolles," said I, in my most winning manner—that is, with courtly deference and just an interrogative touch in my tone. But to my disappointment, M. Méchainet did not answer me, and indeed, I fancy that he did not hear my remark.

A strange change had come over his demeanour. He was not precisely excited, but his pursed lips and knitted brows showed that he was greatly preoccupied. His glance, lost in space, seemed to indicate that he was studying some mysterious, intricate problem. He had drawn a snuff-box from his pocket, and incessantly drew forth enormous pinches, which, after rolling between his fore-finger and his thumb, he carried to his nose—without inhaling them, however. This was one of his little private manias which I had previously observed, and which greatly amused me. The worthy man held snuff in horror, and yet he was always provided with a huge, meretriciously adorned snuff-box, such as players use when enacting a farce upon the stage. If anything unforeseen happened to him, were it either agreeable or afflictive, he invariably drew this monster snuff-box from his pocket, and pretended to regale himself with a vast number of pinches. Later on, I learnt that the subterfuge formed part of a system he had invented with the view of concealing his impressions and diverting the attention of folks around him.

In the meanwhile, we were rolling on. The cab climbed the precipitous Rue de Clichy, crossed the outer boulevard, turned into the Rue de Lécluse, and drew up a short distance from the number that had been given to the driver. It was materially impossible to go any further, for the street was crammed with a compact crowd. In front of No. 39, two or three hundred persons were standing with extended necks, gaping mouths, and inquisitive eyes. Their curiosity was so keen that they utterly disregarded the authoritative injunctions of half a dozen sergents de ville who, as they passed to and fro, kept on repeating: "Move on! move on!"

Alighting from the vehicle, we approached the house, elbowing our way through the crowd, and we were but a few steps from the door of No. 39, when one of the sergents de ville roughly bade us draw back. My companion took in the man's measure from head to foot at a single glance, and drawing himself up to his full height, exclaimed:

"Don't you know me? I am Méchainet, and this young man (pointing to myself) is with me."

"Oh, pray excuse me, sir," stammered the sergent de ville, saluting us with military precision. "I did not recognise you—I was not aware—but please walk in."

We crossed the threshold. In the hall a stalwart, middle-aged

woman, with a face as red as a poppy, was perorating and gesticulating in the midst of a group of tenants belonging to the house. She was evidently the concierge or doorkeeper.

"Where is it?" roughly asked M. Méchinét, cutting her recital short.

"On the third floor, sir," she replied; "on the third floor—the door on the right hand. Oh Lord! what a misfortune! In a house like ours! And such a worthy man, too!"

I did not hear any more, for M. Méchinét had already sprung towards the staircase, up which I followed him, climbing four stairs at a time, and with my heart palpitating as if I were about to lose my breath. On the third landing, the door on the right hand side was open. We went in, crossed an ante-room, a dining-room, and a parlour, and finally reached a bed-chamber of ample size. Were I to live a thousand years, I should never forget the sight that met my eyes. At this moment even, I can still picture in my mind every particular of the scene.

Two men were leaning against the mantel-piece in front of the door. One of them, whose frock-coat was begirded with a tricolour sash, was a commissary of police; the other, an investigating magistrate. A young man, plainly the latter's clerk, was seated writing at a table on the left hand side; while on the floor in the centre of the room, lay a lifeless body—the body of a little, white-haired, old man, who was stretched on his back, with extended arms, in the midst of a pool of black, coagulated blood.

In my terror, I remained rooted on the threshold—so overcome, indeed, that to avoid falling I had to lean for support against the framework of the door. And yet, like every man of my profession, I was already familiar with death. I was accustomed to all the sickening sights which are every-day occurrences in an hospital or a medical school, but then, this was the first time that I found myself face to face with crime. For it was evident that an atrocious crime had been committed.

Less impressed than myself, my neighbour entered the room with a firm step.

"Ah, it's you, Méchinét," said the commissary of police. "I am sorry I sent for you."

"And why, pray?" asked my neighbour.

"Because we shan't need to appeal to your skill. We know the culprit. I have given the necessary orders, and he must be arrested by now."

Singularly enough, it looked as if this news sadly disappointed M. Méchinét. He drew out his snuff-box, pretended to take two or three pinches, and exclaimed: "Ah, you know the culprit!"

It was the investigating magistrate who replied: "Yes, know him certainly and positively," said he. "When the crime was accomplished the murderer fled, believing that his victim had ceased to live. But Providence was watching. . . The poor old man still breathed. Summoning all his energy he dipped a finger in the blood that was flowing from his wound, and there on the floor he traced his murderer's name, thus handing him over to human justice. However, look for yourself."

On hearing this I immediately glanced at the floor, on one of the oak boards of which, the letters M O N I S were traced in blood, in rough but legible fashion. "Well?" asked M. Méchinét, laconically.

"Well," replied the commissary of police ; "those letters form the first two syllables of the name of Monistrol, which is that of the murdered man's nephew—a nephew of whom he was very fond."

"The d—I," ejaculated my neighbour.

"I don't fancy," resumed the investigating magistrate ; "I don't fancy that the scoundrel will attempt to deny his guilt. Those five letters are terrible proof against him. And besides, he is the only man who could benefit by such a cowardly crime. He is the sole heir of this poor old fellow, who leaves, I am told, considerable wealth behind him. Moreover, the murder was committed last night, and the only person who visited the victim was his nephew Monistrol, who, according to the concierge, arrived at nine o'clock, and did not leave till nearly midnight."

"It's clear, then," rejoined M. Méchainet, "as clear as daylight. That fellow Monistrol is a perfect fool." And, shrugging his shoulders, he asked : "Did he steal anything—did he force open any article of furniture to mislead one as to the motive of the crime ?"

"Up to the present," replied the commissary, "we have not noticed anything out of order. As you say, the scoundrel is not particularly ingenious. As soon as he is arrested, he will no doubt confess." Thereupon he drew M. Méchainet to the window, and spoke to him in a low voice ; while the magistrate turned to give some orders to his clerk.

III.

So far as M. Méchainet was concerned, my curiosity was satisfied. I had wished to know my enigmatical neighbour's profession, and now I knew it. He was simply a detective. Thus, all the incidents of his seemingly erratic life were explained—his frequent absence from home, his tardy return at night-time, his frequent change of costume, his sudden disappearances, his wife's fears and complicity, and even the wound I had dressed. But all this was of little moment now. I was far less interested in M. Méchainet than in the spectacle offered to my view. I had gradually recovered both my firmness and the faculty of reflecting ; and I examined everything around me with eager curiosity. Standing beside the door, my glance took in the whole room. When scenes of murder are portrayed in illustrated periodicals they are usually invested with an exaggerated aspect of disorder. But such was far from being the case in the present instance. Everything testified to the victim's easy circumstances and habits of order and relative parsimony. Everything was in its place. The bed and the window curtains were faultlessly draped ; and the woodwork of the furniture was bright with polish—a proof of daily care. It appeared evident that the conjectures of the commissary and the magistrate were correct, and that the old man had been murdered the night before, just as he was going to retire to rest. In proof of this the bed was turned down, and a night-shirt and a night-cap were spread out open on the counterpane. On the little table at the head of the bed I perceived a glass of sugared water, a box of lucifers, and an evening newspaper—the *Patrie*. On the corner of the mantel-shelf shone a weighty copper candlestick, but the candle which had lighted the crime had burnt away. The murderer had plainly fled with-

out blowing it out, and the top of the candlestick, from which hung a few fragments of wax, like pendant icicles, was greatly soiled and blackened.

I noticed all these circumstances well nigh at the first glance. My eyes seemed to play the part of a photographic lens, and the scene of the murder fixed itself on my mind as on a prepared sheet of glass, with such precision, accuracy, and effect, that even to day I could draw from memory the bed-room occupied by the Little Old Man of Batignolles, without forgetting any single object it contained—without omitting even the green-sealed cork, which I still seem to see, lying on the ground underneath the chair of the magistrate's clerk. I was not previously aware that I possessed this power of observation—this master faculty, so suddenly revealed to me, and on the spot I was too greatly excited to be able to analyse my sensations and impressions.

Curiously enough, I was possessed of an unique, irresistible desire. I felt impelled, despite myself, towards the corpse extended in the middle of the room. At first I battled with my impulse, but it was stronger than all my other feelings; and, yielding to it at last, I approached the body. Had my presence been noticed? I do not think so. At all events, no attention was paid to me. M. Méchainet and the commissary were still talking beside the window; and the clerk was reading the minutes of the proceedings in an under tone to the magistrate. Everything, therefore, favoured my design, and besides, I was seized, as it were, with a kind of fever which made me insensible to what was going on. Under this influence, I was well nigh unconscious of the functionaries' presence, and, acting as if I were alone and free to do whatever I liked, I knelt down beside the corpse, to examine it closely and at my ease. Indeed, far from reflecting that the magistrate or the commissary might indignantly ask: "What are you about?" I acted as composedly as if I were about to discharge some pre-assigned duty.

The unfortunate old man seemed to be from seventy to seventy-five years of age. He was short and very thin, but certainly very hale for his age, and constitutionally fitted to become well nigh a centenarian. He still possessed a fair crop of curly hair of a yellowish white tinge, and his face was covered with grey bristles, as if he had not shaved for five or six days. They had sprung forth, however, since his demise, and it is indeed curious to note how rapidly, under certain circumstances, the beard grows immediately after death. I was not surprised by this, for I had observed many similar cases among the "subjects" provided for the examination of us students in the hospital dissecting hall. What *did* surprise me was the expression of the old man's face. It was calm and, I might almost say, smiling. His lips were parted as if he had been on the point of making some friendly remark. Death must have overtaken him most suddenly and promptly, for his face to retain this good-natured look. Such was the first thought that presented itself to my mind. Ay, but then, how could one reconcile these conflicting circumstances—sudden death, and the tracing of those five letters M O N I S on the floor? To trace these letters with his own blood would require a great effort on the part of a dying man. Only the hope of vengeance could lend the requisite energy for such a task. And how enraged this poor old fellow must have been to feel the grip of death upon him before he was able to finish writing his murderer's name!

Enraged? But no, for the face of the corpse seemed positively to smile at me, and this was all the more singular as the victim had been struck at the throat with a steel weapon, which had penetrated right through his neck. This weapon must have been a dagger, or perhaps one of those formidable double-edged Catalan knives, which are pointed as finely as a needle. In all my life I had never been a prey to such strange sensations. My temples beat with extraordinary violence, and I could feel my heart swelling and almost bursting with intensity of dilation. What was I about to discover?

Still under the influence of the same mysterious, irresistible impulse which annihilated my will, I took hold of the victim's frozen, rigid hands to examine them. The right hand was quite clean, unstained; but such was not the case with the left one, the forefinger of which was red with blood! What! had the old man traced that accusatory inscription with his left hand? Was it probable? was it likely? No, a thousand times no! But then. A score of conflicting thoughts battled in my mind, and, seized as it were with vertigo, with haggard eyes and hair on end, as pale certainly as the corpse extended on the floor, I sprang to my feet, giving vent to a terrible cry: "Great God!"

My shriek must have resounded through the house. With one bound the magistrate and Méchiné, the commissary and the clerk were by my side. "What is the matter?" they asked, with eager excitement; "what is the matter?"

I tried to answer, but emotion well nigh paralysed my tongue. All I could do was to point at the dead man's hands, and stammer: "There, see there!"

M. Méchiné immediately knelt down beside the corpse. He observed the same particulars as myself, and evidently shared my opinion, for, quickly rising to his feet again, he exclaimed: "After all, it was not the old man who traced those letters." And then, as the magistrate and the commissary stared at him with gaping mouths, he showed them that the victim's left hand alone was stained with blood.

"And to think I didn't notice it!" mourned the commissary, looking very much distressed.

"Ah, it's often like that," retorted M. Méchiné, frantically pretending to inhale repeated pinches of snuff. "The things that stare us in the face are frequently those that most easily escape our view. . . However, the situation is now quite changed. As it is evident that the old man did not write those letters, they must have been traced by the man who killed him."

"Quite so," observed the commissary in an approving tone.

"Well," continued my neighbour, "it is plain enough that a murderer is not foolish enough to denounce himself by writing his own name beside his victim's corpse. We shall all agree on that point, and so you may draw your own conclusions."

The investigating magistrate looked thoughtful. "Yes," he muttered; "it's clear enough. We were deceived by appearances. . . Monistrol is not guilty. But then, who can be the culprit? It will be your business to find him, M. Méchiné."

The magistrate paused, for a police agent of subaltern rank was at that moment entering the room. "Your orders are executed, sir," said

the new comer, addressing himself to the commissary; "Monistrol has been arrested, and he is now under lock and key at the Dépôt. He has confessed everything."

IV.

THE news created all the greater sensation as, by reason of my discovery, it was altogether unexpected. The magistrate and the commissary looked absolutely stupefied, and, for myself, I was overwhelmed. What, whilst we were busily seeking, by a mathematical course of reasoning, to establish Monistrol's innocence, he, on his side, had formally confessed his guilt! Was it possible? M. Méchiné was the first to recover from this hard blow. He excitedly carried his fingers from his snuff-box to his nose at least a dozen times, and then, turning to the agent, roughly remarked: "You've either been misled or else you are misleading us. There's no other alternative."

"I swear to you, Monsieur Méchiné," began the man.

"Don't swear, pray; but hold your tongue. Either you misunderstood what Monistrol said, or else you've flattered yourself with the hope of astonishing us by the news that the whole affair is explained."

The police agent, who had hitherto been most respectful in his demeanour towards the detective, now evinced signs of revolt. "Excuse me," he said, "but I'm neither a fool nor a liar, and I know what I say."

The discussion seemed so likely to turn into a dispute that the magistrate thought it advisable to intervene. "Calm yourself, M. Méchiné," said he, "and wait for information before pronouncing judgment." And turning towards the agent, he added "Now, my good fellow, just tell us what you know, and explain what you have already said."

Finding himself thus supported the agent drew himself up, gave my neighbour a glance of withering irony, and then, with an air of no little self-conceit, began: "You gentlemen instructed Inspector Goulard, my colleague, Poltin, and myself to arrest a party named Monistrol, a dealer in imitation jewellery, residing at No. 75 Rue Vivienne, and charged with the murder of his uncle here, at Batignolles."

"Quite correct," remarked the commissary, with an approving nod.

"Well, then," continued the agent, "we took a cab and drove to the Rue Vivienne. Monistrol was in a little room at the rear of his shop, and he was about to sit down to dinner with his wife—a woman of wonderful beauty, between five-and-twenty and thirty years of age. On perceiving us all three in a row, the husband at once asked us what we wanted, whereupon Inspector Goulard drew the warrant out of his pocket, and replied: 'In the name of the law I arrest you.'"

As the agent proceeded with his narrative, M. Méchiné turned and twisted with nervous impatience. "Can't you come to the point?" he suddenly asked.

But the agent took no notice of the interruption. "I have arrested a good many fellows in my time," said he, with unabated composure; "but I never saw any one experience such a shock as this man Monistrol. 'You must be joking,' he said at last, 'or else you make a mistake.' 'No,' said Goulard; 'we don't make mistakes.' 'Well then,

why do you arrest me?' Goulard shrugged his shoulders. 'Don't behave like a child,' he said. 'Come, what about your uncle? His body has been found, you know, and there are convincing proofs against you.' Ah, the scamp! What a blow it was for him! He staggered and let himself fall on to a chair stammering some unintelligible reply, half the words of which remained in his throat. On seeing this, Goulard caught him by the collar of his coat, and said: 'Take my advice: the best thing you can do is to confess.' Thereupon he looked at us in an idiotic manner, and replied: 'Well, yes, I confess everything.'

"Well done, Goulard!" quoth the commissary, approvingly.

The agent triumphed. "We were bent on getting the business over as soon as possible," he said. "We were instructed not to create a disturbance, and yet a lot of idlers had already collected in front of the shop. So Goulard caught hold of the prisoner by the arm, and said: 'Let's be off; they are waiting for us at the Prefecture.' Monistrol drew himself up as well as he could on his quaking legs, and, summoning all his courage, answered: 'Yes, let us start.' We thought the business finished after that, but we had reckoned without the wife. Up till then she had remained in her arm chair as still as if she had fainted, and without saying a word. Indeed, she scarcely seemed to understand what was going on. But when she saw that we were really going to carry her husband off, she sprang forward like a lioness, and threw herself before the door. 'You sha'n't pass,' she cried. 'Pon my word she really looked superb. But Goulard has had to deal with many similar cases. 'Come, come, my little woman,' said he, 'don't get angry. It wouldn't do any good.' But instead of moving she clung to the framework of the door, vowing that her husband was innocent, and declaring that if he were taken to prison she would follow him. At one moment she threatened us, and called us all sorts of names, and then she began to beg and pray in her softest voice. But when she perceived that nothing would prevent us from doing our duty, she let go of the door and threw her arms round her husband's neck. 'Oh my poor, dear husband!' she gasped; 'is it possible that you can be charged with such a crime? Tell these men that you are innocent.' Her grief was so great that we all felt compassion for her, but Monistrol, to our surprise, was ruffian enough to push the poor little woman back, so violently indeed that she fell all of a heap in a corner of the room behind the shop. . . . Fortunately, that was the end of it. The woman had fainted, and we profited of the circumstance to pack the husband into the cab, which was waiting for us outside. He could scarcely stand, much less walk, and so we had literally to carry him into the vehicle. His dog—a snarling, black mongrel—wanted to jump in with us, and we had all the pains in the world to get rid of the beast. On the way Goulard tried to revive the prisoner and induce him to talk, but we couldn't get him to say a word. It was only on reaching the Prefecture that he seemed to recover his wits. When he had been properly stowed away in one of the secret cells, he flung himself on his bed, repeating 'What have I done! Good God! What have I done?' On hearing this Goulard approached him, and for the second time, asked: 'So you own that you are guilty?' Monistrol nodded his head affirmatively, and then said, in a gasping voice, 'Pray leave me alone.' We did so, after placing a superintendent outside the

cell, in front of the grating, so as to be ready in case the prisoner tried to play any tricks with his own life. Goulard and Poltin remained at the Préfecture, and I came on here to report the arrest."

"All that is very precise," muttered the commissary; "very precise indeed."

Such was also the magistrate's opinion, for he murmured, "How can any one doubt Monistrol's guilt after that?"

As for myself, I was astonished but not convinced, and I was about to open my mouth to raise an objection when M. Méchainet forestalled me. "All that's very well," said he, "only if we admit that Monistrol is the murderer, we also have to admit that he wrote his own name there on the floor, and to my mind that's rather too strong to be believed!"

"Pooh!" rejoined the commissary, "as the prisoner confesses, what is the use of troubling about a circumstance which will no doubt be explained in the course of the investigation?"

However, the detective's remark had rekindled the magistrate's perplexity. "I shall go to the Préfecture at once," he said, "and question Monistrol this very night." Then after requesting the commissary to stay and accomplish the remaining formalities, pending the arrival of the medical men who had been summoned for the post-mortem examination, he took his departure, followed by his clerk and the agent who had come to announce Monistrol's arrest.

"I only hope those doctors won't keep me waiting too long," growled the commissary, who was thinking of his dinner; and he then began to discharge his duties by sealing up sundry drawers and cupboards which contained articles of value.

Neither Méchainet nor myself answered him. My neighbour and I were standing in front of each other, evidently absorbed in the same train of thought. "After all," murmured the detective, "after all, perhaps it *was* the old man who traced those letters."

"With his left hand, then," said I. "Is it likely? And besides, the poor fellow must have died instantaneously."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Well, judging by his wound, I would swear to it. But the doctors will soon be here, and they will tell you whether I'm right or wrong. Of course I am but a student, and they will be able to speak with more authority than myself."

M. Méchainet was worrying his nose with spurious pinches of snuff in frantic style. "Perhaps," said he; "perhaps there *is* a mystery underneath all this. It is a point to be examined. We must start the inquiry afresh. And after all, why not? Well, let us begin by questioning the doorkeeper." With these words he hurried out on to the landing, and leaning over the bannister of the stairs, exclaimed, "Eh! doorkeeper, doorkeeper, just come up here, please."

V.

PENDING the doorkeeper's appearance, M. Méchainet devoted his time to a rapid but sagacious examination of the scene of the crime. The outer door of the apartment particularly engaged his attention. The

lock was intact and the key turned in either sense without the slightest difficulty. It was therefore scarcely likely that a stranger had forced his way into the old man's rooms by means of a picklock or a false key. Whilst the detective was thus occupied I returned into the bedroom to pick up the green-sealed bottle cork which I had noticed lying on the floor. I was prompted to do this by the new instinct so suddenly born within me. On the side of the sealing-wax a circular, winding hole, plainly produced by the tip of a corkscrew, was apparent, whilst at the other end, ruddy with the stain of wine, I noticed to my surprise a deep perforation, such as might be caused by the blade of a sharp, finely-pointed weapon. Instinctively suspecting that this discovery might have its importance, I showed the cork to M. Méchiné, who on perceiving it could not repress an exclamation of delight. "Ah!" said he, "at last we are on the scent. That cork was evidently left here by the murderer. He had pricked his weapon into it—either to prevent the point from wounding him whilst he carried it in his pocket, or to keep it sharp and prevent it from breaking. So the weapon was plainly a dagger with a fixed handle, and not one of those knives that shut up. With this cork I will undertake to find the murderer, no matter who he may be."

The commissary of police was finishing the sealing-up of the cupboards in the bedroom, and M. Méchiné and I were still talking together in the parlour, when a sound of heavy breathing interrupted us. At the same moment, the portly, stalwart crone whom I had noticed in the hall perorating for the benefit of the tenants, appeared upon the threshold. Her face was ruddier than ever. "What do you desire, sir?" she asked, looking at M. Méchiné.

"Please sit down," he replied.

"But I have people waiting for me downstairs, sir."

"They can wait. Just sit down."

M. Méchiné's authoritative tone evidently impressed the old woman, and without more ado she obeyed him. "I require certain information," he began, fixing his piercing gray eyes on her's, "and I am going to question you. In your interest I advise you to answer me frankly. As you are the doorkeeper of the house you can tell me the name of this unfortunate old man who has been murdered."

"His name was Pigoreau, my good sir, but he was generally called Anténor, which was a name he formerly took in his business, as being better suited to it."

"Had he lived long in this house?"

"For more than eight years, sir."

"Where did he live before then?"

"In the Rue de Richelieu, where he had his shop, for he had been a hairdresser, and it was in that calling that he made his fortune."

"So he was rich, then?"

"Well, I've heard his niece say that he wouldn't let his throat be cut for a million francs."

The investigating magistrate was probably fully informed on this point, for during his sojourn in the house he had gone carefully through all the old man's papers.

"Now," resumed M. Méchiné, "what kind of man was this M. Pigoreau *alias* Anténor."

"Oh, the best man in the world, my good sir," replied the doorkeeper. "He was a bit eccentric and obstinate, but he wasn't proud. And when he chose, he could be so funny! One might have spent nights and nights listening to him when he was in the humour to talk, for he knew so many stories. Just fancy, he had been a hairdresser, and, as he often said, he had curled the hair of all the most beautiful women in Paris."

"How did he live?"

"Like other people—like a man living on his income, but not inclined to be prodigal."

"Can't you give me any particulars?"

"To be sure I can, sir, for it was I who cleaned his rooms and waited on him. Ah! he didn't give me much trouble, for he did a great deal himself. He was always sweeping and dusting and polishing. That was his hobby! Every day, at twelve o'clock, I used to bring him up a cup of chocolate and a roll; and on the top of them he would drink off a big glass of water at one gulp. That was his breakfast. Then he dressed himself, and that took him till two o'clock, for he was very particular about his appearance, and arrayed himself every day just as if he were going to be married. When he was dressed he went out, and strolled about Paris till six o'clock, when he used to go and dine at a table d'hôte, kept by Mlles. Gomet in the Rue de la Paix. After dinner he usually went to the café Guerbois, took his cup of coffee, and played his game at cards with some friends he used to meet there. He generally came home at about eleven o'clock. He had only one fault, poor dear man: he was dreadfully fond of the fair sex, and I often used to say to him, 'Come, Monsieur Anténor, aren't you ashamed to run after women at your age?' But then we are none of us perfect, and after all his behaviour wasn't surprising on the part of a man who had been a fashionable hairdresser, and had met with so many favours in his time."

An obsequious smile curved the portly crooner's thick lips as she spoke on this point, but M. Méchainet remained as grave as ever. "Did M. Pigoreau receive many visitors?" he asked.

"Very few, sir. The person who came most frequently was his nephew, M. Monistrol, whom he used to invite to dine with him every Sunday at the restaurant of 'Père Lathuile?'"

"And on what terms were they—the uncle and the nephew?"

"Oh, they were as friendly as two fingers of the same hand."

"And didn't they ever have any disputes together?"

"Never! Excepting that they always used to disagree about Madame Clara."

"Who is this Madame Clara?"

"Why, M. Monistrol's wife, to be sure, and a superb creature she is, too! But with all his love for the sex, M. Anténor couldn't put up with her. He used to tell his nephew that he loved his wife too much, that she led him by the nose, and deceived him just whenever she chose. He pretended that she didn't love her husband, that she had tastes above her position, and that she would end one day by doing something foolish. In fact, Madame Clara and M. Anténor had quite a quarrel last year. She wanted the old man to lend M. Monistrol a large sum, so that he might buy the 'goodwill' of a jeweller's shop in the Palais Royal; but he refused to do so, and said he didn't care what was done

with his fortune when he was dead, but that in the meantime, having earned his money himself, he meant to keep it and spend it as he chose."

I thought that M. Méchainet would insist on this point, which seemed to me of high importance, but to my surprise, and despite all the signs I made him, he did not do so. "How was the crime discovered?" was his next question.

"Why, it was discovered by me, my good sir!" replied the doorkeeper. "Ah! it was frightful! Just fancy, at noon to-day I came upstairs as usual with M. Anténor's chocolate. As I waited on him I had a key of his rooms. I opened the door, came in, and, Good Heavens! what a sight I saw!" So saying, the buxom dame gave vent to a succession of unearthly whines and groans.

"Your grief shows that you have a kind heart," observed M. Méchainet gravely. "Only, as I am pressed for time, I must ask you to master it. Come, what did you think when you saw the old man lying there murdered?"

"Why, to be sure, I told every one that his rascally nephew had killed him to get hold of his fortune!"

"How is it you were so certain on the point? For it is a grave matter to charge a man with such a crime—it's sending him to the scaffold, mind."

"But who else could it be, sir? M. Monistrol came to see his uncle yesterday evening, and when he went away it was almost midnight. I thought it strange that he didn't speak to me, even when he came or when he left, for he generally wishes me good-day and good-bye. However, after he went away last night, and until I discovered everything this morning, I'm quite sure that no one else came to see M. Anténor."

This evidence fairly stupefied me. I was young then and wanting in experience, and therefore thought it really superfluous to continue the investigation. But, on the other hand, M. Méchainet could boast of very extensive experience indeed, and he moreover possessed the art of coaxing the whole truth out of a witness, no matter however unwilling. "So," said he to the doorkeeper, "you are quite certain that Monistrol came here last night?"

"Quite certain, sir."

"Then you saw him, and recognised him?"

"Ah, allow me! I didn't look him in the face, for he passed by very fast, as if he wished to hide himself, the scoundrel! And besides, the stairs are badly lighted."

I sprang from my chair on hearing this answer, which struck me as being of very great weight indeed, and, advancing towards the doorkeeper, I exclaimed, "If that is the case how can you dare to pretend that you recognised M. Monistrol?"

The portly dame looked at me from head to foot, and, with an ironical smile, replied, "If I didn't see his face, at least I saw his dog, who was with him. I always treat the animal kindly, and so he came into my room, and I was just going to give him a leg of mutton bone, when his master whistled to him from upstairs."

I looked at M. Méchainet to know what he thought of this answer, but his expression told no tales. He simply asked, "What kind of a dog is M. Monistrol's?"

"He's a watch dog, sir—quite black, with just one white spot on the top of the head. M. Monistrol calls him Pluto. He's generally very savage with strangers, but then he knows me well, for he has always been in the habit of coming here with his master, and besides, I've always been very kind to him."

M. Méchainet now rose from his chair. "That will do," said he to the doorkeeper; "you may retire. Thank you for your information." And as soon as the woman had bustled out of the room, he turned to me exclaiming, "I really think that the nephew must be the guilty party."

While the doorkeeper's interrogatory was progressing, the two medical men who had been instructed to perform a post-mortem examination of the old fellow's body, had arrived and set about their task in the bedroom. I was particularly anxious to know what would be the result of their report—the more so as, despite my own conclusions, I feared they might possibly disagree. They were certainly of very dissimilar appearance and character; for, while one of them was short and fat, with a round and jovial face, the other was lank and lean, with a grave and pompous expression of countenance. You could not look at them, indeed, without at once thinking of Molière's immortal creations, "Doctor Tant Pis" and "Doctor Tant Mieux." But, at times, extremes meet, and at least on this occasion this unmatched pair not merely met in being but in ideas and opinions as well. They both took absolutely the same view of the case, and I was delighted, as an amateur detective, and flattered, as a medical student, to find that their view exactly coincided with mine. Indeed, their report resolved itself into this: "The death of M. Pigoreau was instantaneous. He expired directly the knife or dagger penetrated his neck, and consequently he could not possibly have traced those five letters M O N I S, inscribed on the oak floor beside his body."

Thus I had not been mistaken, and I turned with satisfaction towards M. Méchainet to hear what he would have to say now. "Well, if the old man did not write those letters," he remarked at last, "who could have written them? Not Monistrol, I would take my oath to that. It would be altogether too incredible."

I myself made no rejoinder, but the commissary of police, who was delighted to be able to go away to his dinner after such a long and tiring task, overheard the words, and could not resist the pleasure of taunting the detective for his perplexity and obstinacy, which, to his mind, were all the more ridiculous as Monistrol had confessed the crime.

"Ridiculous?" ejaculated M. Méchainet; "well, yes, perhaps I am *only* a fool! However, the future will decide that point." And then, abruptly turning to me, he added: "Come, M. Godeuil, let us go together to the Préfecture of Police."

VI.

WE had neither of us dined, but this puzzling affair so absorbed our minds that we did not even think of feeling hungry. On reaching the street we walked as far as the outer boulevard where we engaged another cab to take us to the Préfecture. While the vehicle rolled on

down the Rue de Clichy and along the Chaussée d'Antin, crossing the grand boulevards, already all ablaze with light, and cutting through numerous narrow thoroughfares in the direction of the Rue de Rivoli and the Quays, M. Méchainet's fingers did not stop travelling from his empty snuff-box to his nose, and *vice versa*—so great indeed was his pre-occupation. Over and over again, moreover, I heard him grumble between his teeth, "I must find out the truth; I must, I will."

All of a sudden he drew from his pocket the green-sealed cork which I had handed to him, and turned it over and over like a young monkey, who, in possession of a nut for the first time, asks himself how he is to get at the kernel. "And yet," he murmured, "and yet that's a piece of evidence. That green sealing-wax must be made to tell us something."

Comfortably ensconced in my corner, I listened to him without saying a word. My situation was certainly very singular, and yet I did not for one moment think of its peculiarity. My mind was entirely absorbed in this affair, the diverse contradictory elements of which I tried to classify in my brain, turning to one after the other in hopes that it would give me the key of the mystery which, to my idea, assuredly existed.

When our vehicle drew up on the Quai des Orfèvres all around was silent and deserted—not a sound, not a passer-by. The few shops of the neighbourhood were all closed, with but one solitary exception—a little tavern and eating-house, situated almost at the corner of the famous Rue de Jérusalem, so long associated with the repression of crime, and the name of which, synonymous, so to say, with the word "police," suffices to chill the blood of the most hardened rogues. Against the red curtains of the tavern windows, which shone out in the dark night with a fiery glare, I noted the shadows of numerous customers—subordinate officials of the Préfecture, who had profited of a spare moment to come out and refresh themselves, and detectives, who, after a long day's arduous tramp and toil, were bent on restoring tired nature with a crust and a glass of wine. As we walked by, M. Méchainet just gave a glance inside, more from habit than curiosity (for, like myself, he was in no mood to loiter), and then turned swiftly into the Rue de Jérusalem.

"Do you think they will let you see Monistrol?" I asked him, breaking once more into a trot so as to keep up with his rapid stride.

"Certainly they will," he answered. "Am I not entrusted with following up the affair? According to the phases of the investigation, I may require to see the prisoner at any hour of the day or night." And then turning under the dark-arched entrance of the Préfecture, he added, "Come, come, we have no time to lose."

I did not require encouragement. A strange, vague curiosity filled my mind as I followed in his wake. This was the first time in my life that I crossed the threshold of the Préfecture de Police, against which I had hitherto been quite as prejudiced as any other Parisian. Those who study social questions may well ask how it happens that the French police are so generally hated and despised. Even the ordinary street policeman, yclept the *sergent de ville*, is an object of aversion; and the detective, the *mouchard*, is loathed as intensely as if he were some

monstrous horror, in lieu of generally being a most useful servant of society. The deep-rooted prejudices that prevail among the Parisians in reference to the police are of distant origin, and are no doubt due to many causes; but the fault mainly rests with the successive governments which, turning the force from its original mission as a guarantee of public security, transformed it into a political instrument, utilising its services for the execution of the most arbitrary measures, and frequently placing it under the control of low-minded, immoral men. The unpopularity of Voyer d'Argenson duly fell on the "*exempt*" of the *ancien régime*; and besides, the hateful Bastille and the odious *lettre de cachet* would alone have sufficed to make the police an object of aversion and terror in those times. Under the Empire and the Restoration the service could not possibly hope for rehabilitation, for was it not under the control of the arch-traitor Fouché, as arrant a scoundrel as any of the criminals his subordinates were employed to track? And in the days of Vidocq, moreover, when the maxim "set a thief to catch a thief" was put into practice, and when the "security" of the Parisians was entrusted to a band of knaves, all respect for the police beame quite out of the question. Even when the force was thoroughly re-organised, the stain of former times clung to it persistently, and a new form of unpopularity awaited it when the Third Napoleon made the Préfecture the head-quarters of his system of government. The ferocity displayed by many *sergents de ville* in days of popular turmoil, the hateful practices of the political *mouchards*, the invention of spurious plots and riots, "got up" to terrify the provinces and justify acts of repression—all combined to throw odium on the force. It should be mentioned, however, that the Parisian in his aversion for the police often acts without discernment. He takes all the *sergents de ville* or *gardiens de la paix* to be of one and the same class and character, forgetting that it is mainly the Central Brigade that is employed on political duty. This Central Brigade, indeed, does not perform ordinary strict service, but is always at the préfet's disposal to be dispatched to any part of the capital where occasion may require. To the "Centrale" is assigned the sad privilege of charging the crowd, ill-treating inoffensive passers-by, and overturning women and children on days of popular effervescence. But the other brigades, to which are entrusted the protection of property and the safety of citizens, are composed of men of a very different stamp—men who behave reluctantly and with moderation when necessity compels them to assist the "Centrale" in the performance of some political task; men whose main object and desire is to prevent the perpetration of crime and to bring evil-doers to book. But then, luckily for them, they wear the same uniform as their colleagues of the "Centrale," and the Parisian confounds the whole force in his blind aversion. He blunders in the same way respecting the detectives—forgetting that there is the criminal service and the political service, and that the two are utterly distinct. To him the *mouchard* is invariably an unprincipled, eavesdropping knave, who earns his living by prying into other people's secrets and denouncing them to his employers. He habitually pictures the detective as a man who slinks along the boulevard trying to overhear what the promenaders are talking about, or who lingers half asleep in the corner of a café bent on listening to the conversation of the customers.

The *mouchard*, to his idea, is invariably the man who questions your doorkeeper, or *concierge*, concerning your antecedents, your trade or profession, your income, and your mode of living, and who, if your opinions are not perfectly orthodox, marks a cross against your name, signifying that you are to be watched and "run in" as soon as an opportunity for political repression presents itself. The Parisian does not realise, and yet he certainly should know it, that there are other detectives of a very different stamp—men like the great Monsieur Lecoq and the eminent Monsieur Méchainet, who in their whole career never do one day's political service, but, on the contrary, spend their lives constantly tracking crime and unravelling fraud—risking incredible dangers, often wounded, and at times even killed in the performance of their duty, and yet always ready and willing to undertake any task, however perilous, to ensure the safety of society and bring offenders to book. That those men, who truly constitute the "strong arm of the law," and thanks to whose energy and enterprise Parisian crime is so swiftly and certainly punished, should be confounded with the obnoxious, political *mouchard*, is an act of utter ingratitude and injustice; but then Paris, although priding itself on its common sense, is unfortunately too impulsive, too prejudiced, and too apt to draw sweeping conclusions, to perceive the difference—vast as it may be.

As I followed M. Méchainet that night into the head-quarters of the criminal service, the main "points" of this long but I think not useless digression flashed through my mind in a twentieth part of the time it has taken me to jot them down. I realised the folly of the prejudices I had shared with so many others, and as my neighbour walked on in front of me he seemed to grow in height, importance, and dignity. Here, then, was one of those men who devote themselves to the most arduous profession that can exist, and who, for the dangers they brave, and the services they render, only reap contumely and contempt. For what is their modest stipend? It barely suffices for their every-day wants, and does not permit of laying money by, so that a scanty pension, only acquired after long, long years of toil and peril, becomes their sole resource, in their old age. I was so immersed in thought of this character, as my neighbour and I entered the Préfecture, that I forgot to look where I was walking, but a sudden stumble against a projecting angle of the pavement at last brought me back to reality. "So, here is the secret of Paris!" I muttered, glancing at the damp blank walls of the passage we had entered, "Ah, if those stones could only talk, what stories they would have to tell."

At this moment, we reached a little room where a couple of men sat playing cards, whilst three or four others lounged on a camp bedstead, smoking their pipes. M. Méchainet went inside, and I waited on the threshold. He and one of the cardplayers exchanged a few words, which did not reach me, and then he came out again, and once more bade me follow him. After crossing a courtyard and hurrying down another passage, we found ourselves in front of a formidable iron gate, with massive close-fitting bars, weighty bolts, and a huge lock. At a word from M. Méchainet a keeper opened this gate, and then, leaving on our right hand a spacious guard-room, where a number of sergents de ville and gardes de Paris were assembled, we climbed a very precipitous

flight of stairs. On the landing above, at the entry of a narrow passage lined with a number of little doors, we found a tall, fat, jovial-featured individual, who in no wise resembled the gaoler usually read of in novels. "Hallo!" exclaimed this smiling colossus. "Why it's Monsieur Méchiné!" And with a self-satisfied chuckle he added, "To say the truth I half expected you; come, I bet you want to see the fellow who has been arrested for murdering the little old man of Batignolles?"

"Quite so. Is there anything new, pray?"

"No, not that I know of."

"But the investigating magistrate must have been here?"

"Oh, yes; in fact he only left a few minutes ago."

"Ah! did you hear him say anything?"

"Well, he only remained two or three minutes with the prisoner, and he looked delighted when he left the cell. He met the governor at the bottom of the stairs, and I heard him say, 'That fellow's account is as good as settled. He didn't even venture to deny his guilt.'"

On hearing this, M. Méchiné almost bounded from the floor, but the gaoler seemingly failed to notice his surprise, calmly resuming, "I wasn't particularly astonished when I heard that, for directly the fellow was brought to me, I said to myself, 'Here's a chap who won't know how to plan a defence.'"

"And what is he doing now, pray?"

"Well, he's lamenting—sobbing and crying as if he were a baby in long clothes. I was instructed to watch him, so as to prevent him from committing suicide, and as a matter of course, I perform my duty; but, between you and I, watching is quite useless, I've taken his measure properly enough. He's only crying because he's afraid of the guillotine. He's one of those chaps who are more anxious about their own skins, than about other persons'."

"Well, let's go and see him," interrupted M. Méchiné. "And above everything pray don't make a noise."

Thereupon, we all three turned round and walked on tiptoe to a door hard by. At the height of a man's head, a barred aperture had been cut in the stout oak panelling, so that the interior of the cell, badly lighted by a single gas burner, could be viewed from the passage. The gaoler gave a glance inside, M. Méchiné did the same, and then my turn followed. On a narrow iron bedstead, covered with a grey blanket with yellow stripes, I could perceive a man extended on his stomach, with his head buried in his hands. He was weeping, and his sobs were plainly audible. At times he quivered from head to foot with a kind of convulsive spasm; but otherwise he did not move.

"You may open the door now," said M. Méchiné to the keeper, after a moment's pause.

The man obeyed, and we all three walked into the cell. On hearing the key grate in the lock, the prisoner had raised himself to a sitting position, and now, with drooping arms and legs, and with his head leaning on his chest, he looked at us as if either stupefied or idiotic. He was from five to eight and thirty years of age, rather above the medium height, with a broad chest, and a short apoplectic neck. He was not a handsome man; far from it, for he had been grievously disfigured by

the small-pox, and besides, his retreating forehead and long nose gave him altogether a simple, sheepish look. However, his blue eyes were very soft and winning, and his teeth were remarkably white and well set.

"What? monsieur Monistrol!" began my neighbour on entering the cell. "What! you are worrying yourself like that?" And he paused as if respecting a reply. But finding the unfortunate man speechless, he determined to tackle him in a different fashion. "Come, come," he accordingly resumed. "I agree that the situation isn't very lively; and yet, if I were in your place, I should like to prove that I'm a man. I should try to curb my grief, and set about proving my innocence."

"But I am not innocent," answered the prisoner, in a savage tone.

This time equivocation was out of place. There was apparently no longer any room left for doubt, for it was from Monistrol's own lips that we obtained this terrible confession. And yet M. Méchiné seemed scarcely satisfied. "What!" asked he, "was it really *you*?"

"Yes, it was I," interrupted the prisoner, springing to his feet with bloodshot eyes, and foaming mouth, as if he were seized with a sudden attack of madness. "It was I—I alone. How many more times must I repeat it? Why only a little while ago, a judge came here and I confessed everything to him, and even signed my confession. What more do you want? Oh, I know what's in store for me, and pray don't fancy that I'm afraid! Having killed, I must be killed in my turn as well; so chop off my head, and the sooner you do it, the better!"

Although, at first, somewhat disconcerted by this violent outburst, M. Méchiné promptly recovered himself. "Come, come," said he. "Wait a minute pray. People are not guillotined like that. First of all, they must be proved to be guilty. And then, justice takes due account of certain disorders of the mind, of certain sufferings and impulses—fatalities if you like—and it was indeed for that reason, that 'extenuating circumstances' were invented."

Monistrol's only reply was a long, low groan of mental agony.

"Now answer me," resumed M. Méchiné. "Did you really hate your uncle so much as all that?"

"Oh, no," promptly answered the prisoner.

"Well, then, why did you kill him?"

"I wanted his fortune," replied Monistrol in a panting voice. "My business was going to rack and ruin. You may make enquiries on that point. I needed money; and although my uncle was very rich, he wouldn't assist me."

"I understand," rejoined M. Méchiné. "And you hoped that you would escape detection?"

"Yes, I hoped so."

At this point, I began to understand why my neighbour was conducting the interrogatory in this desultory fashion, which at first had so surprised me, and I guessed what kind of trap he was preparing for the prisoner. Indeed, the very next moment he curtly asked, "By the way, where did you buy the revolver you shot your uncle with?"

I looked eagerly and anxiously at Monistrol, but he did not evince the least surprise. "Oh, I had it by me for some years," he replied.

"And what did you do with it, pray, after committing the crime?"

"I threw it away on the outer boulevard."

"Very good. I will have a search made, and no doubt we shall be able to find the person who must have picked it up."

While M. Méchiné spoke in this fashion—deliberately lying in order to arrive at the truth—his features retained an expression of imperturbable gravity. "What I can't understand," added he, after a moment's pause, "is that you should have taken your dog with you."

"What! my dog!" ejaculated the prisoner, with an air of genuine surprise.

"Ay, your dog, Pluto. The doorkeeper recognised him."

Monistrol clenched his fists, and his lips parted as if he were about to make some savage rejoinder, but at the same moment a new thought evidently darted through his mind, and he flung himself once more on his bed, exclaiming, in a tone of resolution, "That's enough torture; come, leave me to myself. At all events, I sha'n't answer any more."

As he was plainly bent on keeping his word, M. Méchiné refrained from insisting, and we left the cell together. We went silently downstairs, and crossed the passages and courtyards of the Préfecture, without exchanging a remark. But when we reached the quay, I could control my thoughts no longer. "Well, what do you think now?" I asked, catching my neighbour by the arm. "You heard what that unfortunate fellow said. He pretends to be guilty, and yet he doesn't even know how his uncle was killed. That question about the revolver was a stroke of genius on your part. How readily he fell into the trap! After that, it's plain enough that he's innocent; for, otherwise, he would have told us that he did the deed with a dagger, and not with a revolver, as you pretended."

"Perhaps so," answered the detective, and then, with a sceptical air, he added, "After all, who knows? I've met with so many actors in my time. But, at all events, that's enough for to-day. Let us go home. You must come and eat a mouthful at my place. To-morrow, when it's daylight, we'll continue our inquiry."

VII.

It was ten o'clock at night when M. Méchiné, still followed by myself, rung at the door of his lodgings. "I never carry a key," he said to me, "for in our cursed trade no one knows what may happen. There are so many scoundrels who owe me a grudge, and besides, if I am not always prudent as concerns myself, I must be so for my wife."

My neighbour's explanation was superfluous, for I fully realised the dangers to which he must be exposed. And moreover, when I was previously watching him with the view of penetrating the secret of his seemingly mysterious life, I had already noticed that he rung at his door in a peculiar manner, evidently preconcerted between his wife and himself.

The bell was answered by pretty Madame Méchiné in person. With feline agility and grace, she flung her arms round her husband's neck, gave him a pair of passionate kisses, and gaily exclaimed, "Ah, so here you are at last! I don't know why, but I almost felt uneasy."

But all of a sudden she paused, her bright smile died away, her brow

lowered, and, loosening her hold around her husband's neck, she drew several paces back. The fact is, that she had just caught sight of me, standing close by, on the threshold. That Monsieur Méchiné and myself should return together at the same time—and so late at night—seemed to her a most suspicious circumstance. "What! have you only just left the café?" she asked, speaking as much to me as to her husband. "You have been there up till ten o'clock at night? Really, that's too bad!"

I turned to my neighbour for his reply. An indulgent smile flickered on his lips, and his attitude was that of a man who, confident in his wife's trustfulness, knows that he need only say one word to quiet her ruffled mind. "Don't be angry with us, Caroline," he exclaimed, thus associating me with his own cause. "We left the café hours ago, and we haven't been wasting our time. The fact is, I was fetched away on business—for a murder committed at Batignolles."

On hearing this, Madame Méchiné glanced suspiciously at both of us, and then, seemingly convinced that she was not being deceived, she curtly ejaculated, "Ah!"

The exclamation was brief enough, and yet it was full of meaning. It was evidently addressed to her husband, and signified, "So you have confided in that young man? You have made him acquainted with your profession, and you have revealed our secrets to him?" At least, that is how I understood the word, and my neighbour plainly construed its meaning in the same style, for he impetuously answered, "Well, yes, M. Godeuil has been with me this evening. And pray, where's the harm? If I have to fear the scoundrels whom I've handed up to justice, what need I fear from honest folks? Do you think, my dear, that I hide myself—that I am ashamed of my profession?"

"You misunderstood me, dear," objected Madame Méchiné.

But her husband did not even hear her. He had already sprung on to his favourite hobby, and, once astride, he was not easily persuaded to dismount. "Now, really," said he, "you have most singular ideas, my love. What! Here am I, a sentinel at the advanced posts of civilisation. I sacrifice my peace of mind, and risk my life to ensure the safety of society, and yet you think I ought to blush for my profession! It would be altogether too comical. You may tell me that there are a lot of foolish prejudices abroad respecting the police. No doubt there are, but what do I care for them? Oh! I know that there are a number of susceptible folks who pretend to look down on us. But, *sacrebleu*, I should like to see their faces, if my colleagues and myself were only to go on strike for a single day, leaving Paris at the mercy of the legion of scoundrels whom we keep in respect."

Madame Méchiné was no doubt accustomed to outbursts of this kind, for she did not answer a word; and indeed she acted wisely, for as soon as my neighbour perceived that there was no prospect of his being contradicted, he calmed down with surprising promptness. "Well, that'll do," said he; "just now we have a more pressing matter to deal with. We have neither of us dined, we are dying of hunger, and we should be glad to know if you have anything to give us to eat."

Plainly enough, Madame Méchiné often had to cope with similar emergencies, for, with a pleasant smile, she readily answered, "You

shall be served in five minutes." And in fact, a moment later we were seated at table before a succulent joint of cold beef ; while my neighbour's wife filled our glasses with one of those bright-coloured, refreshing wines, for which Macon enjoys renown. While M. Méchainet plied knife and fork with amazing earnestness, I glanced round the cosy little room, and stole a look at plump, pleasant-faced Madame Caroline, so attentive and so full of spirits—asking myself if this were really the abode of one of those "ferocious" detectives, so erroneously portrayed by ignorant novelists. However, the first requirements of hunger were soon appeased, and M. Méchainet then began to relate our expedition to his wife. He spoke with great precision, entering into the most minute particulars ; and, seated beside him, she listened with an air of shrewd sagacity, interrupting him every now and then to ask for explanations on some obscure point, but without expressing any opinion of her own. However, I divined that her own views were to come, for, plainly enough, I was in presence of one of those homely Egerias, who are not merely accustomed to be consulted, but are also wont to give advice—and to see that advice followed. In fact, as soon as M. Méchainet had finished his narrative, she drew herself up, and exclaimed, "You have made one very great blunder, and, to my mind, an irreparable one."

"And what is that, pray ?"

"Why, on leaving Batignolles, you ought not to have gone to the Préfecture."

"But Monistrol."

"Ah ! yes, I know ; you wanted to question him. But what was the use of it ?"

"Well, my examination enlightened me—"

"Not at all. Instead of going to head-quarters you should have hurried to the Rue Vivienne, have seen the wife and questioned her. You would have surprised her while she was still under the effects of the emotion which her husband's arrest must necessarily have caused her ; and if she was an accomplice in the crime, as must be supposed, you might, with a little skill, have easily made her confess."

On hearing this I almost sprung from my chair with surprise. "What?" cried I. "Do you really think that Monistrol is guilty, madame ?"

She hesitated for a moment, and then replied, "Yes, I fancy so."

On hearing that, I wished to urge my own views of the case, but she prevented me from doing so by swiftly resuming : "One thing I'm certain of—positively certain—the idea of that murder came from Monistrol's wife. Of every twenty crimes that men commit, fifteen are certainly planned or inspired by women. Just ask my husband if that is not the case. And besides, you ought to have been enlightened by the statements which the doorkeeper at Batignolles made. Who is this Madame Monistrol ? You were told that she is very beautiful, very coquettish and ambitious, hankering after wealth, and wont to lead her husband by the nose. Now what was her position prior to the crime ? Was it not needy, straightened, and precarious ? She was greatly vexed, no doubt ; she suffered acutely at not being able to satisfy her tastes for expense ; and we find proof of that in the fact that she asked her husband's uncle to lend them a large sum. The old man refused to do so, and all her hopes were crushed. She must have hated him after

that ; and no doubt she often said to herself, 'If that old miser only died, we should be in comfortable circumstances.' But the old man still lived on ; he was hale and hearty yet, and his fortune seemed a long way off. She no doubt asked herself, 'Is he going to live a hundred years? Why, at this rate, when he dies we shall have no teeth left, and besides, who can tell, perhaps he means to bury us.' That was undoubtedly her starting point. With such ideas in her head she was led by a natural gradation to think of committing a crime. And when she had determined in her own mind that, as the old man would not take himself off in the ordinary course of nature, he must be got rid of by foul means, she no doubt began to weigh on her husband, inspiring him with the idea of murder, and seeking to silence his qualms of conscience, till at last, when all was ripe, she virtually put the knife in his hand. Threatened with bankruptcy, maddened by his wife's lamentations, the unfortunate fellow started off, and murdered his uncle in a foolish, blundering manner no doubt, and without even thinking of the consequences that might overtake himself."

"All that is logical enough," opined M. Méchainet, when his wife, who had worked herself into a state of considerable excitement whilst speaking, at length brought her address to a close.

Logical—yes, no doubt it was ; but then, what became of the various particulars we had noted? I could not forget my own observations at Batignolles ; and so, turning to Madame Méchainet, I asked her, "Then you think that Monistrol was fool enough to denounce himself by writing his own name in blood, on the floor?"

"Fool enough?" she answered, with a slight shrug of the shoulders. "But come now, was it such an act of folly after all? I myself don't think so ; for it is this very circumstance that constitutes your greatest argument in favour of his innocence."

This reasoning was so specious that I was for a moment disconcerted.

"But he confesses his guilt," I urged, as soon as I recovered myself.

"Well, that's an excellent system to induce the police to establish his innocence."

"Oh, madame !"

"Why, you yourself are proof of that, Monsieur Godeuil."

"But the unfortunate fellow doesn't even know *how* his uncle was murdered."

"Excuse me, suppose he only *pretended* that he didn't know it—that would be a very different thing."

My discussion with Madame Méchainet was becoming heated, and no doubt it would have lasted some time longer, if at this point her husband had not thought fit to intervene. "Come, come, Caroline," said he, "you are really too romantic to-night." And speaking to me, he added, "I will knock at your door to-morrow morning, and we will go together to see Madame Monistrol. For the present, good-night. I'm quite tired and half asleep already."

He was a happy man, my neighbour, to be able to sleep in blissful forgetfulness of the problem waiting to be solved. No doubt he had only acquired this faculty of isolating his mind from his daily labours after long years of practice and experience. He had had to deal with so many crimes before, he had had to investigate such strange, mys-

terious cases, and almost invariably with satisfactory results, that he probably considered it futile to rack his mind, at night-time, anent such an affair as this; knowing well enough that when he awoke refreshed on the morrow, he would be able to weigh and estimate all the accumulated items of evidence with a clear head. But then, I was very differently situated; I stood on the threshold of *terra incognita*, too absorbed and perplexed for my thoughts to allow me a moment's rest. Thus I did not close my eyes all night. A mysterious voice seemed to rise from the innermost recesses of my being and murmur, "Monistrol is innocent!" I pictured to myself the unfortunate fellow's sufferings as he lay extended on his camp bedstead at the Dépôt; and at the thought that his agony was perhaps undeserved my heart softened with compassion. But then, in the midst of these phases of pity, the same question invariably returned to my mind, rekindling all my perplexity, "If Monistrol were really innocent, why had he pleaded guilty?"

VIII.

WHAT lacked me in those days—as I subsequently had a hundred occasions of observing—was experience, professional practice, and exact knowledge of the means of investigation at the disposal of the police. I vaguely realised that this inquiry had been conducted in a far too haphazard, superficial manner; but I should have been greatly embarrassed had I been called upon to point out the mistakes that had been made, or to say what ought to have been done. And yet at the same time I took, as I have already said, a passionate interest in Monistrol. It indeed seemed to me as if his cause were mine; and, after all, the feeling was but a natural one, for was not my own reputation for acumen at stake? The first doubt concerning his guilt had been occasioned by an observation I myself had made, and it seemed to me as if I were now bound to prove his innocence.

But then my discussion with Madame Méchainet, and the latter's romantic and yet not illogical theories, had so disconcerted me that I did not know what fact to select for the foundation of my defence. At each circumstance I turned to I was met by Madame Caroline's objections, and I wandered restlessly from one to the other without knowing at which to pause. As always happens when the mind is applied during too long a time to the solution of a problem, my ideas at last became as entangled as a skein in a child's hands. I could distinguish nothing clearly, and was only conscious of chaos.

It was nine o'clock in the morning, and I was still busy torturing my brain, when M. Méchainet, mindful of the promise he had made the night before, entered my room to inform me that it was time to start. "Come, come," said he; "let us be off."

I sprang to my feet at once, and followed him out of the room. We hastily went downstairs, and on reaching the street I noticed that my worthy neighbour was rather more carefully dressed than usual. He had succeeded in giving himself that well-to-do, easily-pleased air which Parisian shopkeepers delight to find among their customers; and he was, moreover, radiant with all the gaiety of a man who knows that he is

marching to certain victory. "Well?" he asked, as we walked down the Rue Racine, side by side; "well, what do you think of my wife? The big guns at the Préfecture consider me to be a shrewd fellow, and yet you see I consult her; and I may add, that I have often done so with profit. After all, where's the harm? Wasn't Molière in the habit of consulting his servant? Caroline certainly has one little failing, as perhaps you may have noticed. To her mind there are no stupid crimes, and so she invests every scamp with most diabolical powers of invention. However, my failing is just of the opposite kind. While she is always hunting after romance, I am rather too much inclined to look merely at positive facts. But, by combining our two systems—taking a little of the one, and a little of the other—it generally happens that we ultimately arrive at the truth."

"What!" cried I, interrupting M. Méchainet; "do you think that you have penetrated this Monistrol mystery?"

He stopped short, drew his huge snuff-box from his pocket, took three or four imaginary pinches, according to his wont, and then, in a tone of mingled reserve and satisfaction, replied, "Well, at least I possess the means of penetrating it."

"Oh!" stammered I, wondering what this means might be, and yet deterred from further questioning by my companion's air of discretion.

But my mind was soon busy with a new train of thought. Crossing the Seine by the Pont des Arts, and traversing the court-yard of the Louvre, we had made for our destination by way of the Rue Croix des Petits Champs and the Bank of France. The streets were all alive with traffic; merchants and clerks were hurrying in and out of the bank; the neighbouring shops displayed a variety of costly wares. Signs of luxurious prosperity were indeed apparent on every side, and as I noted them I could not help remembering that surroundings often have a decisive influence on character. What indeed was Clara Monistrol, according to Mme. Méchainet's theory? An ambitious, coquettish woman, fond of display, hankering after wealth, and envious of other folks' good fortune. Even if the evil grain had not pre-existed in her mind, might not the seeds of covetousness have been sown by life in such a centre? The Rue Vivienne is no fit abode for poverty or struggling circumstances. From one end to another you can hear the jingle of specie and the rustle of flimsies. Here are the Boulevards—all life, splendour, and display; here at mid-distance is the Bourse—the Giant Temple of Mammon—crowded each afternoon with the devotees of fortune; here, at each step you take, are the offices of money-changers, stock-brokers, and bill-discounters; and even when wealth does not assert itself in the shape of bullion, notes, and shares, it is present in a thousand other forms. Here is some shop-window crowded with precious works of art; here are tantalising toilettes and bewitching bonnets; and here, at the photograph stores, are portraits upon portraits of wonderfully-adorned actresses, and elegant belles of society—all appealing to the mind of a covetous woman, eager for wealth and anxious to be admired. And note that the Bank of France, with its cellars full of millions, is but a stone's throw off; and that the Palais Royal, with its galleries scintillating with diamonds, stands at the top of the street. What a neighbourhood for such a woman as Madame Monistrol! If the portrait sketched by the doorkeeper of

Batignolles were faithful to reality, and if Mme. Méchiné's deductions were correct, must not Clara Monistrol have endured unspeakable torture, living, in her comparative poverty, in the midst of this El Dorado? Must she not have been perpetually tantalised, tempted, goaded on by the every-day spectacle of all this wealth—of all these pricely wares, of all these costly adornments? She had looked no doubt with hungry eyes on many a coveted object, and the thought that there was only that little old man at Batignolles between her present envy and the attainment of her desires, had returned and returned, with increasing force, until at last she was persuaded to instigate this crime. Looking at the case in this light, and leaving my previous observations on one side, it really seemed to assume a very different aspect.

But I was unable to carry my deductions further, for, at this point, worthy M. Méchiné interrupted my reverie. We had just reached the Rue Vivienne, and stood at the corner of the National Library. "Now, follow me," said my neighbour; "keep your eyes and ears open, but don't speak unless we remain alone; and, no matter what happens, be careful not to express any surprise."

He did well to warn me, for otherwise I should not have failed to manifest my astonishment at the course he took a moment later. Abruptly crossing the street, he walked straight into an umbrella shop—one of those fashionable establishments where only the most costly articles are sold. As stiff and as grave as an Englishman, he made the mistress of the shop show him, in turn, well nigh every umbrella she had in stock. But nothing seemed to please him; he rejected even the most perfect articles, always having some objection ready to meet the praises which the shopkeeper lavished on her goods. At last, he asked her if she could not undertake to make him an umbrella on a pattern he would furnish. "It would be the simplest thing in the world," she answered; and thereupon M. Méchiné promised that he would return on the morrow with the pattern in question. The woman conducted us back to the door with many marks of deference—for, in Paris, the more fastidious a customer shows himself, the more he rises in a dealer's esteem—and the next moment we stood on the pavement outside, myself with admiration glowing on my face, and M. Méchiné with a radiant air of self-satisfaction.

The fact is, that he had good reason to be satisfied, for the half-hour spent in that shop had by no means been thrown away. Whilst examining all the umbrellas that were shown to him, he had skilfully contrived to pump the shopwoman of all she knew about the Monistrols, both man and wife. After all, it was a comparatively easy matter, for the murder of the little old man of Batignolles, and the arrest of the dealer in imitation jewellery, had caused a perfect sensation throughout the neighbourhood of the Rue Vivienne, and formed the one great topic of current gossip.

"There!" exclaimed M. Méchiné, as we proceeded slowly along the street. "There, that's how we obtain trustworthy information! If I presented myself in my real character, folks would assume a pompous air, launch forth grandiloquent phrases about vice and virtue, and then good-bye to plain, simple, unvarnished truth!"

My neighbour enacted the same little comedy in seven or eight other

shops of various kinds along the street ; and in one establishment, where the dealer and his wife at first showed themselves somewhat reserved and taciturn, he contrived to loosen their tongues by expending a "Napoleon" on a little purchase. To my amusement we spent a couple of hours or so in this fashion, and then M. Méchinot opined that further inquiries would be superfluous, for we now knew enough to gauge the current of public opinion. In point of fact, we were very fairly acquainted with what the tradesfolk of the neighbourhood thought of M. and Madame Monistrol, who had resided in the Rue Vivienne ever since their marriage, some four years previously.

There was but one opinion concerning the husband. He was, according to general report, a very good-natured, worthy man—obliging, honest, industrious, and fairly intelligent. It was scarcely his fault, we were told, if his business had not prospered. Fortune does not always smile on those who are most deserving of her favours. Monistrol, it appeared, had acted unwisely in taking a shop which seemed fated to bankruptcy, for, within a period of fifteen years, four dealers of different trades had failed in it. The jeweller was greatly attached to his wife—every one knew it, and repeated it ; but he had not unduly paraded his affection, or shown himself extravagantly uxorious and jealous. None of the people whom M. Méchinot questioned believed in Monistrol's guilt. In fact, they invariably remarked : "The police must have made a mistake, and will soon find it out."

In reference to Madame Monistrol opinions were on one point divided. Some of the neighbours considered that her tastes were of too elegant a character for her position, whilst others opined that in a shop like her husband's, it was imperative that the mistress should be fashionably attired. However, it was only on this question that our informants differed. They united in declaring that Madame Monistrol was greatly attached to her husband. Her virtue, they said, was unimpeachable. No one had ever heard of her flirting or carrying her coquetry beyond the bounds of personal adornment ; and one individual naively remarked that her conduct in this respect was most meritorious, for she was remarkably beautiful, and had any number of admirers. But she had always remained deaf to their pleadings, and her reputation as a faithful wife was absolutely immaculate.

This information plainly worried M. Méchinot. "It's wonderful," said he to me. "No slander, no back-biting, no queer little stories of misconduct ! I begin to think that my wife must have been mistaken. According to her idea, Madame Monistrol ought to have been one of those brazen beauties who rule the household, and who are fonder of displaying their own charms than their husband's merchandise, one of those women, indeed, whose husbands are either blind fools or else shameful accomplices. And yet I find nothing of all that. The very most that people say, is, that she is rather fond of dress, but, then, that's the case with wellnigh every pretty woman in the world ; and because she has a few elegant whims and a little taste we've no right to brand her with infamy."

I made no reply to these remarks. To tell the truth, I was quite as disconcerted as the detective. What a difference between the fairly eulogious statements made by the neighbours and the disparaging asser-

tions of the doorkeeper at Batignolles ! However, perhaps the discrepancy might be explained ; for, as it occurred to my mind just then, people in different circumstances take different views of things. And moreover, opinions vary with localities. What seems altogether scandalous and disgraceful in the Rue de Lécuse is justifiable, seemly, and even requisite in the Rue Vivienne. The staid and quiet quarter of Batignolles, and the ostentatious easy going district of the Bourse can scarcely be expected to share the same notions of morality.

However, we had already spent too much time in prosecuting our inquiry to think of pausing to discuss our impressions and conjectures. "Now," said M. Méchainet, "Before we tackle the enemy let's have a look at his quarters." And familiar with the practise of carrying on these delicate investigations in the midst of the traffic and bustle of Paris, he drew me under an arched gateway situated just in front of Monistrol's shop.

It was a modest-looking shop indeed, almost a beggarly one, when compared with the fashionable establishments around. The weather-stained front, for instance, sadly required a coat of paint. Above the windows one could read the name of "MONISTROL," formerly traced in gilt letters, but now blackened and dingy, whilst across the panes of glass, on either side of the door, ran the inscription, "GOLD AND IMITATION." Among the articles displayed to view there were, however, but few of standard ore. The imitation goods formed nineteen-twentieths of the stock. Steel-gilt chains, jet ornaments, diadems to which Rhine stones and strass lent a fugitive subdued brilliancy, imitation coral necklets, with brooches, rings, studs, and sleeve links set with false stones of every hue, were displayed in considerable profusion, but their spurious character was altogether too evident for the passing window thief to be deceived.

"Well, let's go in," said I to M. Méchainet, after making a brief survey of the shop.

But the detective was less impatient than myself, or rather he was more expert in restraining his impatience, for catching me by the arm, he exclaimed, "One moment please. Before entering, I should just like to have a glimpse of Madame Monistrol."

However, although we remained for another twenty minutes at our post of observation under the archway, the shop remained deserted. There were no signs whatever of the beautiful Madame Clara, and indeed, we did not even perceive a shop boy or a shop girl behind the counter. "Well, well, that's enough waiting," opined my companion at last. "Come on, Monsieur Godeuil, let us chance it."

IX.

To reach Monistrol's shop we had only to cross the street, a feat we performed in four strides. On hearing us open the door a slatternly looking little servant girl, of fifteen or sixteen years of age, with a dirty face and ill-combed hair, came out of a room in the rear of the shop. "What do the gentlemen require ?" asked she,

"Is Madame Monistrol indoors ?"

"Yes, sir, she's in the room there, and I'll run and tell her you want her, for, you see—"

But M. Méchainet did not allow the maid to finish. He roughly pushed her aside, and exclaimed: "That'll do; as she's there, I'll go and speak to her." And the next moment he walked straight into the room at the rear of the shop.

I followed close behind him on the tiptoe of curiosity and expectation, feeling as it were a kind of presentiment that this visit would result in an explanation of the mystery. I required some little energy to preserve an appearance of calmness, for to tell the truth, my mind was terribly excited, and I could hear my temples throb, and my heart beat pit-a-pat, with most unwonted violence.

The apartment in the rear of the shop was a dreary looking chamber, which apparently did joint duty, as dining-room, drawing-room and bed-room. It was in a state of considerable disorder, and its appointments were such as are common to the abodes of people in straightened circumstances who wish to appear rich. At the further end stood a bedstead partially concealed by pretentiously draped curtains of blue damask. The pillow cases were fringed round with lace and embroidered with huge initial letters, and the rug at the foot of the bed was a flowery imitation of the Aubusson style. In striking contrast with this attempted display of magnificence, appeared the table in the centre of the room. Its greasy oil cloth covering was bestrewn with the remnants of what could not have been a particularly appetising breakfast, served in crockery of the commonest kind. Reclining beside this table in a capacious arm chair, I perceived a young woman, with fair hair and blue eyes, who held between her fingers a legal document on stamped paper. This then was the beautiful Madame Monistrol. Her charms had certainly not been exaggerated. She was slightly above the average height, but admirably proportioned, as with my professional knowledge of anatomy I easily perceived, despite her somewhat recumbent position. Her nose would have done honour to a Grecian beauty, and her lips—although somewhat deficient in colour, a circumstance no doubt due to emotion—offered the graceful curves of Cupid's bow. Her ears were particularly tiny and well-shaped, and her bowed neck, on which lingered the wavy curls of her back hair, seemed as white and as smooth as polished alabaster. Her feet could not be seen from where I stood; but no doubt they were as exquisitely modelled as her hands, which with their fair white skin, their network of pale blue veins, and their tapering fingers tipped with glistening pink nails, would have fairly sent an artist into raptures.

It would be futile to conceal it. I was at first fairly dazzled by this woman's amazing beauty, and reversing all Madame Méchainet's theories anent her culpability, I decided in my own mind, that it was quite impossible such a lovely creature could have instigated the heinous crime of the Rue de Lécuse. But this impression only lasted for a moment, so contradictory and so versatile indeed were my ideas at that prefatory epoch of my career as a detective. It was her dress that made me change my mind. She was in deep mourning, wearing a robe of black crape, cut slightly low at the neck. Now black is admirably adapted to set off fair complexions, and naturally enough this toilette greatly

enhanced Mademoiselle Clara's charms. But on reflection, it seemed to me that a person labouring under deep grief, a prey in fact to harrowing sorrow, would scarcely have had the requisite presence of mind to array herself in this prepossessing style; and I could not help asking myself, if Madame Monistrol were not, after all, an actress who had deliberately assumed the costume of the part she meant to play.

On perceiving us enter the room, she sprang to her feet like a frightened doe, and asked in a tearful voice: "What do you desire, gentlemen?"

From the gleam in M. Méchainet's eyes I could judge that he had mentally made the same remarks as myself. "Madame," he answered, sternly, "I am sent here by the judicial authorities. I am an agent of the detective police."

At this announcement she sunk back into her arm-chair, sobbing, and to all appearance overcome; but suddenly, inflamed as it were with nervous enthusiasm, with bright eyes and quivering lips, she rose once more to her feet, exclaiming in impassioned tones: "Do you come to arrest me, then? Ah! I could bless you for it. Come, I am ready. Lead me away! Let me join the honest man whom you arrested last night! Whatever may be his fate I wish to share it. He is as guiltless as I am myself; but no matter, if he is fated to be the victim of a judicial error, it will be a last joy for me to die beside him!"

She was interrupted by a prolonged growl, coming from one of the corners of the room. I looked up and perceived a black dog, who showed his teeth and glared at us as if he meant mischief. "Down, Pluto, down!" exclaimed Madame Monistrol. "Come, go to bed and keep quiet. These gentlemen don't mean me any harm."

At first the animal seemed disinclined to obey his mistress's command, but at last, without once averting his glaring gaze, he slowly backed under the bedstead, where in the shadow I could still distinguish his bright eyes fixed upon us.

"You are right in saying that we don't mean you any harm, madame," remarked M. Méchainet. "We have not come to arrest you." He no doubt trusted that this intelligence would draw from her some expression of feeling indicative of her hopes or fears; but he was mistaken, for she did not seem to heed it.

"This morning," she resumed, glancing at the paper in her hand, "I received this summons, which orders me to be at the office of an investigating magistrate at the Palace of Justice, at three o'clock this afternoon. What can be wanted of me, good heavens! what can be wanted of me?"

"Why, information, madame," promptly answered M. Méchainet. "Information that may enlighten justice, and, as I hope, prove your husband's innocence. Pray don't look on me as an enemy. Indeed, so far as my professional character allows, I sincerely sympathise with you in your misfortune. My only object, my only ambition is to arrive at the truth." So saying my neighbour drew forth his snuff-box and took a score or so of imaginary pinches. "You will therefore understand, madame," he resumed, in a solemn tone which I had never heard him employ before; "you will understand how important may prove your answers to the questions I shall have the honour of asking you. And so may I beg you to answer me frankly?"

For fully half a minute Madame Clara fixed her big blue eyes on my neighbour and gazed at him through her tears. "Question me, monsieur," she said at last.

For the third time I must repeat it ; I was altogether without experience, and yet the manner in which M. Méchainet had initiated this interrogatory caused me intense dissatisfaction. It seemed to me that he betrayed all his perplexity and wandered on in hap-hazard fashion, instead of marching straight towards a pre-determined object. Ah ! how my tongue itched ! How I should have liked to intervene. If I had only dared. But then, of course, I was no one ; I had no *locus standi*, and was merely there on sufferance. However, during the last few minutes, my worthy neighbour had greatly fallen in my estimation. I forgot the clever manner in which he had questioned Monistrol the night before ; and it seemed to me that if he were well up in the routine of his profession, he was, at all events, quite deficient in that analytical, investigative genius, without which a man cannot hope to become a great detective. Indeed, it really seemed to me that I was his superior in the latter respect, despite my comparative youth and imperfect knowledge of men and things ; and hence I suffered all the more acutely at having to stand still and listen to what I considered his blunders, without any right to intervene and repair them.

My worthy neighbour was, of course, blissfully ignorant of what was passing in my mind. Seating himself on a chair in front of Madame Monistrol, he began as follows : " As no doubt you are aware, madame, it was after nine o'clock on the night before last that Monsieur Pigoreau, or Anténor, as some people called him—in one word—your husband's uncle—was murdered at Batignolles."

" Alas ! yes ; so I have been told," answered Madame Clara.

" Now can you tell me," continued the detective, " where Monsieur Monistrol was between nine o'clock and midnight ?"

" Ah, Lord !" groaned the jeweller's wife, clasping her hands with anguish. " What a fatality !"

M. Méchainet paid no heed to the exclamation. " Excuse me," he resumed ; " you must be able to tell us where your husband was on the evening before last ?"

It was some little time before Madame Monistrol was able to reply, for sobs were rising in her throat and seemed to choke her utterance. At last, mastering her grief, she murmured : " On the day before yesterday my husband spent the evening away from home."

" Do you know where he was ?"

" Ah, yes, I can tell you that. One of our work-people, living at Montrouge, was engaged on a set of false pearls, and had failed to deliver them as promised. We were afraid that the person who had ordered them of us would leave them on our hands, which would have been very annoying, for we are far from rich, and business is bad enough already. So, while we were at dinner that evening, my husband said to me : ' I think I had better go to Montrouge and see if those pearls are not ready yet.' And sure enough, after dinner—rather before nine o'clock—he went out, and I accompanied him as far as the corner of the Rue de Richelieu, where I saw him take the omnibus myself."

I began to breathe again. My original idea had been the right one,

and Monistrol was innocent ; for surely his wife's reply meant an unimpeachable *alibi*. M. Méchainet no doubt had the same thought, for he continued in a softer tone. "If that is the case, your workman could state that M. Monistrol was with him somewhere about eleven o'clock?"

"Ah ! unfortunately no."

"No ? And why not pray ?"

"Because he was not at home. My husband did not see him."

"That is a great misfortune. But still the doorkeeper of the house must have known of M. Monistrol's visit."

"No, monsieur. In fact there is no doorkeeper in the house where our workman lives."

This might be the truth. Similar things have been heard of before ; and yet the judicial authorities would undoubtedly consider the circumstance as a most suspicious one, indeed as an additional indication of the prisoner's guilt. At all events, with such glaring absence of proof, the plea of an *alibi* became quite untenable. Was it this, then, that had impelled Monistrol to plead guilty ? Had he realised that this improbable story of a journey to Montrouge, to a workman who was not at home, and who lived in a house where there was no doorkeeper, would only cause both judge and jury to shrug their shoulders with contempt ? Perhaps he had. He had very likely said to himself, "I am the victim of a fatal combination of circumstances. My statements would be set down as a parcel of lies, concocted in the vain hope of saving myself from the guillotine. I should be doubly branded with infamy ; and so it is best that I should accept my fate and bow my head to the last stroke of that ill luck which has so persistently followed me through life."

Whilst I was pursuing this train of thought, M. Méchainet had resumed his interrogatory. "At what time did your husband come home ?" he asked.

"At sometime after midnight."

"Didn't you think he had been a long while gone?"

"Oh yes ! Indeed, I spoke to him about it, but he said he had come back on foot, and loitered on his way. If I recollect rightly, he had rested in a café and drunk a glass of beer."

"And pray what did he look like when he came home ?"

"Well, he looked annoyed, but that was only natural."

"What clothes was he wearing ?"

"The same as when he was arrested."

"And you didn't notice anything extraordinary about his manner or appearance."

"No, nothing."

X.

STANDING, at a few paces behind M. Méchainet, I was able to watch Madame Monistrol's features at leisure, and take due note of her slightest change of expression. She seemed to be overcome with deep grief, and big tears streamed down her pale cheeks. And yet at certain moments I fancied I could detect something like a suppressed

gleam of joy in the depths of her big, blue eyes. "Is she guilty then?" I asked myself. This was not the first time that the idea had occurred to me, and now, as I stood there watching the jeweller's wife, it returned and returned with such obstinate persistency, that at last I could control myself no longer. Forgetful of M. Méchainet's recommendations, oblivious of the fact that I had no right to interfere in the proceedings, I took a few steps forward, and roughly asked: "But you, madame, where were you on that fatal evening, while your husband was uselessly journeying to Montrouge, to see his workman?"

She raised her blue eyes to mine, gave me a long look of surprise, and then softly answered: "I was here, monsieur, as witnesses can prove to you."

"Witnesses!"

"Yes, monsieur. It was so very warm that evening, that I felt I should like an ice. As it worried me to take it alone, I sent my servant to invite two of my neighbours, Madame Dorstrich, the boot-maker's wife, next door, and Madame Rivaille, who keeps the glove shop over the way. They both accepted my invitation, and remained here with me till half-past eleven o'clock. You may question them, and they will tell you that such was the case. In the midst of all these cruel trials, this accidental circumstance is really a favour from on high."

Was the circumstance of such a purely accidental character as Madame Monistrol pretended? This is what we asked each other, M. Méchainet and myself, by means of a rapid questioning glance. When chance acts so appropriately, it may well have been assisted. At least, this is what I thought, and the swift gleam that shot from my neighbour's eyes in my direction seemed to imply that his opinion was the same. However, this was scarcely the moment for an exchange of observations, which would assuredly have proved suspicious to Madame Monistrol.

"You have never been suspected, madame," declared M. Méchainet, with rare effrontery. "The worst that was supposed was that your husband might perhaps have said something to you before committing this crime."

"Ah! monsieur!" ejaculated Madame Monistrol. "Ah! if you only knew us!"

"One moment, pray. We have been told that your husband's business was not a prosperous one, that he was in needy circumstances."

"Yes, lately, it is true; trade has not been very bright."

"Now your husband must have been very worried and anxious on account of his precarious position. He must have particularly suffered on thinking of you, his wife, to whom he was so attached. For your sake, more than for himself, your husband must have longed to attain a position of ease and fortune."

"Ah! monsieur, I can only repeat it, he is innocent."

M. Méchainet assumed a pensive air, and pretended to fill his nose with snuff; but suddenly raising his head again he exclaimed: "Then, *sacrebleu*, how do you explain his confession? For an innocent man to plead guilty as soon as the crime he stands accused of is mentioned to him is most singular, madame—singular, and indeed astounding."

A fleeting blush coloured Madame Méchainet's cheeks, and for the first time, since the beginning of the interrogatory, her glance wavered. Was

this to be interpreted as a sign of guilt? "I suppose," she answered in a low voice, which a fresh fit of sobbing rendered almost inaudible; "I suppose that my poor husband was so frightened and stupefied at finding himself accused of such a frightful crime, that he fairly lost his head."

M. Méchainet shrugged his shoulders. "At the very most," said he, "the idea of passing delirium might be entertained; but after a long night's reflection, M. Monistrol has this very morning persisted in his original avowals."

Was this true? Had my worthy neighbour been to the Préfecture before calling me, or had he deemed it useful to make this statement without authority? At all events, the news had a crushing effect on Madame Monistrol. She turned ashy white, and I really thought that she was going to faint. We were both looking at her intently, and it seemed as if she could not bear our gaze, for suddenly she hid her face in her hands and murmured, "O Lord, O Lord, my poor husband has gone mad."

Such was certainly not *my* opinion. In fact, I had very different views. I was becoming more and more convinced that this scene, so far as Madame Clara was concerned, was merely so much pure comedy. Her great despair was to my mind so much affectation, and I asked myself if she were not in some fashion or other the cause of her husband's singular attitude, and if she were not also acquainted with the true culprit. Whilst I was thinking, however, M. Méchainet continued to talk. He endeavoured to console Madame Monistrol by a few set phrases which could not possibly compromise him, and then gave her to understand that she might silence a great many suspicions by allowing him to make a minute perquisition throughout the establishment. She accepted the suggestion with unfeigned alacrity and pleasure. "Everything is at your disposal, gentlemen," said she. "Examine everything. I shall really feel obliged by your doing so; and besides it won't take you very long, for we only rent the shop, this room, our servant's room on the top floor, and a little cellar. Here are the keys of everything!"

To my very great astonishment, M. Méchainet expressed his readiness to make a search at once; and forthwith he began ferreting round the room, examining everything with the greatest attention. What could be his object? I wondered. Surely he must have some secret motive; for was it likely that such a perquisition—so readily authorised—would lead to any important discovery? After exploring the shop and the room with as much care as if he had expected to light upon the missing link in our chain of evidence, he turned to Madame Monistrol and remarked: "Well, there's only the cellar left for us to look at now."

"I'll show you the way, monsieur," she answered; and taking a candlestick and a box of lucifers from off the mantelpiece, she conducted us out of the room into a courtyard behind.

We descended a score of slippery stone steps by the light of the flickering candle, and halted in front of an old door covered with cobwebs and mildew. "Here's the cellar," observed Madame Monistrol, unfastening the padlock; and the next moment pushing back the door she led the way inside. It was a damp, ill-kept vault, and its contents were in keeping with the Monistrols' needy circumstances. In one corner was a little barrel of beer, and just in front a cask of wine, more or less securely

perched on a few logs of wood. Taps were affixed both to the beer barrel and the wine cask, showing that they were both on draught. On the right hand side were three or four dozen bottles of wine, probably of a superior kind, ranged on lathes; and in a third corner an equal number of empty bottles could be perceived. I was now beginning to realise M. Méchiné's object. He scarcely glanced at the casks, but taking the candle from Madame Monistrol, he scrutinised the full and the empty bottles with equal attention. I carefully followed his inspection, and like himself I noted that not one of these bottles was sealed with green wax. Thus the inference was, that the cork discovered on the floor in the bedroom at Batignolles, and in which the murderer had evidently imbedded his dagger's point, had not come from Monistrol's cellar. As M. Méchiné was almost as prepossessed as myself in favour of the jeweller's innocence, this result ought to have delighted him; but whatever may have been his secret feelings, he thought fit to assume a look of intense disappointment and remarked, "Well, I find nothing—nothing at all; so I think we may go upstairs again."

I walked the first on this occasion, and thus reached the room in the rear of the shop before the others. Scarcely had I opened the door when Pluto, the black dog with the glaring eyes and ferocious growl, sprang from his resting place under the bed in such a threatening manner that I instinctively retreated a few paces back.

"He seems to be an unpleasant customer that dog of yours," said M. Méchiné to Madame Monistrol.

"No, no," she answered with a wave of the hand, which calmed Pluto as if by magic. "He's a good fellow, but then, you know, he's a watch-dog. We jewellers have so many thieves to fear; and so we have trained him to keep a sharp look out."

The animal was quiet enough now that his mistress was beside him; and wishing to coax him into a more friendly disposition, I called him by his name: "Here, Pluto, here!"

"Oh, it's quite useless for you to call him," carelessly remarked Madame Monistrol. "He won't obey you."

"Indeed! Why not?"

"Why, like all dogs of his breed, he's very faithful. He only knows his master and me."

Many people would have considered such an answer to be altogether insignificant, and yet to me it was as a ray of light shed on the mystery we were investigating. Without pausing to reflect, yielding to the first impulse that entered my head, I eagerly asked: "And pray, madame, where was this faithful dog on the night of the crime?"

So great was Madame Monistrol's emotion and surprise at being asked this question, point blank, that she started back and almost let her candlestick fall from her hand. "I don't know," she stammered; "I don't recollect—"

"Perhaps he followed your husband," I resumed.

"Yes—now I think of it. I fancy he did."

"So you have trained him to follow vehicles then; for you told us that you saw your husband get on the 'bus.'"

She made no rejoinder, and I was about to continue when M. Méchiné forestalled me. Far from seeking to profit by Madame Monistrol's con-

fusion, he did everything he could to set her mind at ease, and after advising her in her own interest to comply with the summons she had received from the investigating magistrate, he bade her good morning, and led me away.

"Have you lost your head?" he asked, when we had walked a few yards down the street.

Lost my head, indeed! Such a remark was fairly an insult. "You are really too hard on me, M. Méchainet," said I. "Few people in their senses could have done more than I have just accomplished. For if I haven't solved the problem, at all events I've shown how it may be solved. Monistrol's dog will lead us to the truth."

This outburst made my worthy neighbour smile. "You are right," said he in a paternal tone; "I quite understood your question about the dog. Only I fear you put it too abruptly. If Madame Monistrol has divined your suspicions, you may be sure that the animal will be dead, or have disappeared before the day is over."

XI.

Yes, I had certainly been most imprudent. There could be no doubt of that. But on the other hand, I had discovered the weak point in the enemy's armour, the flaw which would enable us to penetrate a most artful system of defence. My worthy neighbour was fairly bowled over. Here was he, a celebrity so to say in his profession, possessed of vast experience, and said to be most shrewd. Now, what result had he arrived at during this long interrogatory? Just none at all. He had wandered through and through the maze without finding the smallest outlet, whilst I, a mere apprentice, had discovered the right road at my very first venture. Another man might have shown himself jealous of my success, but M. Méchainet was not given to envious thoughts. His only desire was to utilise my discovery to the very best advantage; and accordingly we decided to hold council at a neighbouring restaurant, one of the best places for a *déjeuner à la fourchette* in this part of Paris.

Without neglecting to ply our knives and forks, for our morning's labours had whetted our appetites to the right degree, we began by establishing the exact position of the problem, so as to arrive more readily at the required solution. To our minds Monistrol's innocence was a moral certainty; and we thought we could guess why he had pleaded guilty. However, for the time being, this was a question of secondary importance. As regards Madame Monistrol we were equally certain that she had not left her neighbourhood on the night of the crime; for it was no doubt perfectly true that she had merely accompanied her husband as far as the omnibus in the Rue de Richelieu, and that she had then returned home and spent the whole evening, as she said, in the company of two of her acquaintances. But although it might be proved that she could not possibly have taken any material part in the perpetration of the crime, there remained the charge of moral complicity, in respect of which a logical sequence of deductions seemed to prove her guilt. To our minds she had been fully acquainted with

the crime—even if she had not indeed advised and prepared it—and consequently she knew the murderer.

Now, who could the murderer be? Must he not be some man whom Pluto, the black dog, was accustomed to obey quite as readily as he obeyed his master and mistress? For we had unimpeachable evidence that the dog had accompanied the assassin to Batignolles. It is true that, before Madame Monistrol was formally questioned on the subject of the dog, she had casually stated that he only obeyed his master and herself; but her subsequent embarrassment pointed to a very different conclusion. Plainly enough Pluto was in the habit of obeying some third person, with whose name we were so far unacquainted. This person must, however, be a very frequent visitor to the Monistrols' shop, for we ourselves had seen how the dog was in the habit of receiving strangers. And yet, although a frequent visitor, he could scarcely be a friend (at least so far as Monsieur Monistrol was concerned), for the crime at Batignolles had been perpetrated in such a manner as to make the jeweller's guilt seem certain. The murderer must therefore be one of M. Monistrol's bitter enemies, for hatred alone could have inspired such fiendish cunning. But on the other hand he must be very dear indeed to *Madame* Monistrol; for, although she knew his name as was morally proven, she refrained from denouncing him, preferring to abandon her husband to the cruel fate he did not deserve.

This course of reasoning could have but one conclusion: Madame Monistrol must have a favoured lover, and that lover must be the murderer of Batignolles. Her neighbours of the Rue Vivienne had no doubt given her a certificate of virtue, but under the circumstances their assurances were insufficient. Women who enjoy the very highest reputations often carry on some shameful secret intrigue for years and years, and are honoured as models of faithfulness and virtue, whereas, if their sin were known, they would be turned from with horror and loathing. Some faithless women possess extraordinary powers of deception, and go to the grave without having been once detected. When started on the road of error, their minds prove fertile in all the resources of hypocrisy and cunning, and although the hundred eyes of Argus may be on them, their secret remains safe. Now, might not Madame Monistrol be one of these women—who are not merely expert in deceiving their husbands, but in deceiving the world as well?

We discussed this question at length, M. Méchainet and I, and our deductions were so fully in keeping with our original theory, that we could not fail to accept them. On the one hand this system proved Monistrol's innocence, even if it did not explain his plea of guilty; and on the other, it was in keeping with a great deal of what Madame Méchainet had said at supper the night before. Clara Monistrol had certainly instigated the crime, but in lieu of entrusting its perpetration to her husband, she had confided it to her lover, hoping to enjoy this ill-gotten wealth in his company, after the unfortunate jeweller had perished on the scaffold, a victim of judicial error, like Lesurques in the famous case of the Lyons mail. But then, accepting these premises, who could this lover of her's be, and how could we discover him?

After torturing my mind for some time, I at length ventured to expound a plan. "It seems to me," said I to M. Méchainet, "that the

murderer can be easily found out. He and Madame Monistrol must have agreed not to see each other for some little time after the crime. The most elementary rules of prudence must have impelled them to take that course. The man will no doubt remain quiet enough. He must know that a false move would cost him his head, and so he will not dare to show himself in the Rue Vivienne; but, on the other hand, the woman will probably become impatient. She will be anxious to see her accomplice, and fancying that she has diverted all suspicion from herself, she will not hesitate to go and meet him somewhere. I would therefore suggest that you should employ one of your colleagues to dog her steps, to follow her wherever she may go; and, if this is only done, properly, why, we shall have caught the murderer before another forty-eight hours are over our heads."

M. Méchainet was grumbling unintelligibly between his teeth, and dipping his fingers into his empty snuff-box with all his wonted persistency. At first he gave me no answer, but suddenly leaning forward he exclaimed: "That won't do, my dear fellow. We musn't let the bird slip through our fingers. We must rather strike the iron while it's hot. No doubt you possess the genius requisite for the profession—in fact, I'm sure you do; but you are wanting in experience and practice. However, fortunately I'm here. Now, listen to me. A single phrase put you on the right track, and yet you don't follow up your advantage."

"I don't understand you."

"Don't understand me? But that dog, we must turn him to account."

"How so?"

"Well, wait and you shall see. In an hour's time or so Madame Monistrol will leave her shop, for she has to be at the Palais de Justice by three o'clock; and the little servant girl will remain behind alone. That will be the time for action, and you will see how I shall settle the whole business."

I did everything I could to induce M. Méchainet to explain himself properly; but in spite of all my prayers and exhortations he refused to say another word on the subject. He carried me off to the nearest café, and compelled me to play him a game at dominoes, which, as a matter of course, I lost; for my mind was too pre-occupied to allow me to engage successfully in such a frivolous pastime, whereas M. Méchainet possessed the happy gift of being able to dismiss business from his thoughts at a moment's notice. Two o'clock was striking when at last he pushed back the dominoes and exclaimed: "To work! to work."

We paid the score and left the café, and a moment later we were standing once more under the arched gateway in front of Monistrol's shop. We had only waited there a few minutes when we saw the door open and the jeweller's wife appear upon the threshold. She wore the same black dress as during the morning, and a long crape veil hang from her bonnet, giving her the appearance of a widow. "She's a clever wench," grumbled M. Méchainet between his teeth; "she means to excite the magistrate's compassion and sympathy."

Whilst he was speaking she walked swiftly down the street, and soon disappeared from view in the direction of the Palais Royal. However,

M. Méchainet decided to wait another five minutes under the archway, and then catching me by the arm he led me towards the shop. As he had opined, the little servant girl was quite alone. She was sitting behind the counter, munching a piece of sugar she had purloined from her mistress. As soon as we entered she recognised us, and rose to her feet with a flushed face and rather frightened air. Before she could open her mouth, however, M. Méchainet roughly asked her : "Where is Madame Monistrol ?"

"She has gone out, monsieur."

"Gone out ! That can't be. You must be deceiving me. She must be in the room there, behind the shop."

"Oh no, monsieur ; she has really gone out, and if you don't believe me, you may look yourself."

M. Méchainet struck his forehead, as if he were grievously disappointed. "What a pity, what a pity !" he repeated. "How disappointed poor Madame Monistrol will be !" And as the girl gazed at him, with gaping mouth and astonished eyes, he continued : "But perhaps you might be able to tell me what I want to know, my good girl. I have only come back because I have lost the address of the person your mistress asked me to visit."

"What person, monsieur ?"

"Ah ! you know him. Monsieur —. Confound it ! Why, I've even forgotten his name now ! Monsieur —. Monsieur —. But surely you'll recollect him. He's the person that your dog Pluto obeys so readily."

"Ah yes, monsieur ! I know who you mean ; it's Monsieur Victor."

"Yes, that's it, to a T. Monsieur Victor ! I mustn't forget again. By the way, what does he do, this Monsieur Victor ?"

"He's a working jeweller, monsieur. He was a great friend of Monsieur Monistrol's, and they used to work together before M. Monistrol set up in business. That's why M. Victor can do anything he likes with Pluto."

"Ah ! Then, if that's the case, perhaps you can tell me where this Monsieur Victor lives ?"

"Certainly I can, monsieur ; he lives at No. 23 Rue du Roi Doré, in the Marais."

The poor girl was seemingly delighted to be able to furnish all this information ; but it was not without a pang that I heard her answer in this trusting manner, unconsciously betraying the secret which her mistress must hold as dear as life itself. M. Méchainet's was a more hardened nature, however ; and, far from being touched by this involuntary treachery, he grimly indulged in a stroke of sarcasm. "Thanks," said he, as he turned to leave the shop. "Thanks ; you have just rendered your mistress a very great service indeed, and she will be exceedingly pleased with you." Then, with a chuckle, he opened the door, and we walked out into the street,

XII.

My first impulse was to hurry off to the Rue du Roi Doré, and apprehend this fellow Victor, who, plainly enough, was the real murderer ; but M. Méchainet damped my enthusiasm with the remark : " And the law ! Don't you know that we are powerless to act, so long as we are without a warrant ? We must, first of all, go to the Palais de Justice, and interview the investigating magistrate."

" But suppose we meet Madame Monistrol there ? " I asked. " If she sees us, she will certainly warn her accomplice."

" Perhaps so," retorted M. Méchainet, with undisguised bitterness ; " perhaps so. The culprit may escape, simply because we have to go through so many irksome formalities. Still, I might perchance parry the blow. However, let us make haste. Come, stretch out your legs."

Anxiety and hope of success lent unparalleled speed to both of us, and a quarter of an hour afterwards we were scrambling up the staircase of the Palais de Justice. The offices occupied by the investigating magistrates communicate with a long gallery, where several attendants are invariably stationed to answer all inquiries. " Can you tell me ? " asked M. Méchainet, in a breathless voice ; " can you tell me if the magistrate who has to deal with the murder of the little old man of Batignolles is in his office ? "

" Yes, he is," answered one of the attendants ; " but he has a witness with him just now—a young woman dressed in black."

" That must be Madame Monistrol," whispered the detective in my ear ; and then, turning again to the attendant, he added aloud : " You know who I am, so just give me a pen and a slip of paper, that I may write a word to the magistrate. Take it to him, and bring me back the answer."

The attendant started off, dragging his shoes along the dusty floor of the gallery, and soon returned to say that the magistrate was waiting for us in an adjoining room. To receive M. Méchainet, he had indeed left Madame Monistrol in his own office with his clerk, and had borrowed the use of one of his colleagues' rooms.

" What is the matter ? " he asked, in a tone which allowed me to estimate the immense difference between an investigating magistrate and a humble detective.

In a clear, brief manner, M. Méchainet related what we had accomplished, what he had learnt, and what we hoped for. But the magistrate scarcely seemed inclined to share our views. " All that is very interesting," said he ; " but Monistrol confesses." And, with an obstinacy that well nigh maddened me, he kept on repeating : " He confesses, he confesses." However, after another series of protracted explanations, he at last consented to sign a warrant, authorising my neighbour to apprehend Madame Monistrol's presumed lover—M. Victor.

As soon as the detective was in possession of this indispensable document, he hurriedly bowed to the magistrate, and bounded out of the room, along the passage, and down the stairs. It was as much as I could do to keep up with him, and in less than a quarter of an hour we covered

the whole distance, from the Palace of Justice to the Rue du Roi Doré—one of those narrow unkempt streets in the heart of the Marais, where each tenement is a busy hive of industry, and whence *articles de Paris*, in all varieties, go forth to the entire world.

On reaching the corner of the street, M. Méchainet paused to draw breath. "Now," said he, "attention!" And with an air of complete composure, he entered the narrow alley of the house bearing the number 23. "M. Victor, if you please?" he asked of the doorkeeper.

"On the fourth floor, monsieur—the door on the right hand as you reach the landing."

"Is he at home?"

"Oh, yes; he must be at work."

M. Méchainet took a step in the direction of the staircase, and then abruptly pausing, turned round again, faced the doorkeeper, and exclaimed: "I must treat my old friend, Victor, to a good bottle of wine. What wine shop does he usually go to near here?"

"To the one over the way."

We reached the shop in six strides, and with the air of an *habitué*, M. Méchainet immediately ordered: "A bottle of wine, please—something good. That wine of yours with the green seal!"

I must confess that this idea had not occurred to me, and yet it was simple enough. As soon as the bottle was brought, my companion produced the green-sealed cork which I had found in the bedroom at Batignolles, and we immediately perceived that the wax was identical in shade and appearance with that on the cork of the bottle that had just been served to us. Thus our moral certitude was reinforced by a material proof. As M. Méchainet had no intention of regaling M. Victor with the bottle of wine he had ordered, we proceeded to imbibe its contents, and then recrossed the street and climbed the stairs of "No. 23."

M. Méchainet gave a sharp rat-tat at Victor's door, and a voice with a pleasant ring immediately responded, "Come in." The key was outside, and accordingly we opened the door. At a table, placed before the window of the room we entered, sat a man wearing a black blouse, and engaged in setting a stone in a gold ring. He was a fellow of thirty or thereabouts, tall and thin, with a pale face and black hair. He was scarcely handsome, but his features were fairly regular, and his eyes were not without expression.

He seemed in no wise disconcerted by our visit. "What do you desire, gentlemen?" he asked politely, at the same time turning round on his stool.

"In the name of the law I arrest you!" exclaimed M. Méchainet, springing forward and catching the workman by the arm.

Victor turned livid, but he did not lower his eyes. "Don't play the fool," he exclaimed, in an insolent tone. "What have I done?"

M. Méchainet shrugged his shoulders. "Come, no child's play, please," said he; "your account is settled. You were seen when you left the Rue de Lécluse at Batignolles, and in my pocket I've got the cork in which you planted your dagger so as to prevent the point from breaking."

These words proved a crushing blow for the murderer, who, taken

utterly by surprise, fell back against his table, stammering, "I am innocent, I am innocent!"

"You can say that to the magistrate," retorted M. Méchainet; "but I'm very much afraid that he won't believe you. Why, your accomplice, the woman Monistrol, has confessed everything."

"That's impossible!" replied Victor, springing up as if he had been touched by an electric battery. "She knew nothing about it."

"Oh! so then you planned the little game by yourself, eh? All right. That confession will do to begin with."

And turning towards me, with the air of a man who knows what he is about, M. Méchainet added: "Please just search the drawers, M. Godeuil. In one or another of them you will probably find this fine fellow's dagger, and I'm sure you'll light on his mistress's portrait and her love letters."

Victor clenched his teeth with rage, and a gleam of fury shot from his dark eyes; but he no doubt realised that all resistance would be futile against a man of M. Méchainet's muscular build, endowed with such a pair of iron wrists.

In a chest of drawers in one corner of the room I speedily found the dagger, the portrait, and the love letters, just as my companion had opined; and a quarter of an hour afterwards Victor had been securely stowed away in a cab between M. Méchainet and myself, and was rolling in the direction of the Préfecture de Police. The simplicity of the scene had well nigh stupefied me. "And so," I mused, "that's how a murderer is arrested. What, is it no more difficult than that to secure the person of a man whose crime is punishable with death?" But in later years I learnt at my own cost and peril that there are other criminals of a far more dangerous stamp.

As for Victor, as soon as he found himself in a cell at the Dépôt, he gave himself up as lost, and made a most minute confession of his crime. He told us that being one of Monistrol's friends, he had been acquainted with old M. Pigoreau for several years. His main object in murdering him had been to designate Monistrol for the punishment of the law, and for this reason he had dressed himself like the jeweller, and had taken Pluto to Batignolles. As soon as the poor old man had ceased to live, he had seized him by the hand, dipped one of his fingers in the blood that flowed from the fatal wound, and traced on the floor those five letters, M O N I S—the discovery of which had so nearly resulted in a deplorable judicial error. "Ah! it was cleverly combined," he added, with cynical effrontery; "if I had only succeeded, I killed two birds with one stone. On the one hand, I got rid of that fool Monistrol, whom I hated, and I enriched the woman I loved. No doubt I might have persuaded her to live with me, after her husband had gone either to the scaffold or the galleys. But now——"

"Ah! my fine fellow!" retorted M. Méchainet; "unfortunately for you, you lost your head at the last moment. But then, no one is perfect. When you traced those letters in blood on the floor, you made a terrible mistake, for you wrote them with one of the fingers of the old man's left hand."

Victor sprang to his feet in astonishment. "You don't mean to say that put you on my track?" he asked.

"Yes, I do."

With the gesture of a man whose genius is misjudged, Victor raised his arms to the ceiling. "Ah!" said he; "it's no use being an artist—no use remaining true to nature!" And, with a glance of mingled pity and contempt, he added: "Don't you know that old M. Pigoreau was LEFT-HANDED?"

He spoke the truth, as subsequent inquiries enabled me to ascertain. So thus, it was a mistake—a blunder perpetrated by myself—which, after all, had led us to the truth. The discovery, on which I had so particularly prided myself, was, in reality, none at all. And it was strange, indeed, that none of us had ever ventured to surmise that the little old man of Batignolles might have been in the habit of writing with his left hand. It is true that such cases are not very frequent—still they exist; but neither the magistrate nor the commissary, neither M. Méchainet nor his wife, had for one moment met my so-called discovery with such an objection—so true it is that the simplest things often escape our minds. However, the lesson was not lost to me, for I profited by it, with good result, on a subsequent occasion of my after life as a detective.

On the morrow, Monistrol was released from prison. The investigating magistrate reproached him in stringent terms, for having led justice astray; but he met all exhortations and reproaches with the same answer: "I love my wife. . . I wished to sacrifice myself for her. . . I thought that she was guilty."

He would say no more, but his conduct implied that he must have had some very serious grounds to believe in his wife's guilt. What could they have been? I decided, in my own mind, that Madame Clara must have previously tried to tempt her husband to commit this crime; but, although weak-minded, beyond a doubt, and passionately attached to her, he had nevertheless had the courage to resist her entreaties. Finding that her efforts were useless, she had, no doubt, turned to her lover, who proved to be of a more pliable character—especially when he was offered such a prize as wealth and undisputed possession of the woman he loved; for the latter contingency would, no doubt, have followed, had Monistrol been sent to the scaffold or the galleys.

It was in this manner that I explained the affair to myself. I could swear that Madame Monistrol was the instigator of the crime. And yet she escaped punishment. Juries do not content themselves with moral proof; and the discovery of her letters and her portrait in Victor's room, was not accounted sufficient evidence against her, when she appeared at the assizes by her lover's side. She was, moreover, defended by one of the most famous advocates of the Paris bar; and then, her tears, which flowed at will, no doubt, touched the hearts of her judges with compassion. Her charms, like those of Phyrné, might also have inspired them with a yet more tender sentiment. To be brief, she was acquitted; whilst Victor, in whose favour the jury saddled their verdict with an admission of "extenuating circumstances," was sentenced to hard labour for life.

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After giving such proof of his conjugal attachment, it is scarcely surprising that weak-minded M. Monistrol should have taken his wife back to his home, if not entirely to his heart, when, after securing the benefit of a doubt, she was ordered to be set at liberty. As a matter of course, old M. Pigoreau's fortune was handed over to the jeweller, but, with Madame Monistrol's extravagant tastes, it could not be expected to last long. Now-a-days, the Monistrols keep an ill-famed drinking den on the Cours de Vincennes, nigh the Place du Trone, and when the barrière bullies, who are their principal customers, are in a good humour, they pay mocking court to the wife, now a corpulent woman, with a bloated face and a husky voice, and sadly addicted to brandy and absinthe. Her charms have fled long since, like old Antenor's money ; and she and her weak-minded husband, whom she often beats in her fits of drunkenness, are swiftly descending the slope of degradation and misery.

J. B. CASIMIR GODEUIL.

THE MATRIMONIAL AMBASSADOR:

MONSIEUR J. D. DE SAINT-ROCH.



I.

No one ever knew exactly why Pascal Divorue resigned his position as a Government engineer, within a fortnight after leaving the "Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées." He, himself, refrained from giving any explanations whatever—perhaps because he had no good ones to give. I mean that he was unable to assign for his conduct any of those specious reasons, based on certain interest and prudent egotism, which alone satisfy people of a commercial mind. And yet, he had plenty of opportunities of telling the truth, or even of lying—had he been so minded—for every acquaintance and distant relative that he possessed within the length and breadth of Paris sounded him as skilfully and as cunningly as they could. They seemed to scent some mysterious little secret, or, better still, some spicy little scandal; and no wonder, therefore, that they were so anxious to ascertain the truth.

But Pascal was unkind enough not to admit them into his confidence. He estimated, at their true value, all the pestering, inquisitive folks who pretended to take, in his welfare, an interest which they had never really felt. He deliberately laughed in the faces of all his obliging acquaintances, with honeyed tongues, who were wont to smile most obsequiously at success, but who invariably tightened their purse-strings at the first glimpse of misfortune. But, despite his rebuffs, a few of them proved obstinately pertinacious, and, in his desire to get rid of them, once and for all, Pascal drew them aside, and, glancing round him like a suspicious conspirator, whispered in their ears the one mysterious word—"politics." Now, it was difficult, indeed, to imagine that politics could have had anything to do with his resignation, for he had never evinced the slightest interest in party questions; but, nevertheless, the stratagem succeeded, and his obstinate questioners fled in terror, as if they already perceived the dungeons of Mont St. Michel about to close upon them, and heard the jingle of the gaoler's keys.

Having thus repulsed the enemy, Pascal was left alone; but relatives and acquaintances alike went forth into society, repeating that he was a most unsociable young man, utterly wanting in frankness, and most par-

ticularly to be feared on account of his dreadfully advanced opinions. As for the few whom Pascal considered to be really his friends, he simply owned to them that although he was a Frenchman, and a very good patriot to boot, he held all kinds of uniform in horror, however decorated and embroidered they might be—adding that Government employment was not at all suited to his character; that he preferred running the risks of trade to receiving a fixed salary, however high; and that he treasured personal independence far more than administrative honours, even had the latter come in the form of a ministerial portfolio. After all, the friends to whom he spoke in this fashion were quite indifferent as to the hidden motive of his conduct. It was all the same to them whether he did one thing or the other, and, accordingly, they unanimously declared that his voice was the voice of wisdom, and that he was quite right in choosing his own road.

The only person who blamed the young engineer, and paternally declared that he had acted with imprudent precipitation, was his bosom friend and confidant, his old college chum—Eugène Lorilleux. During several years they had studied together, and they had remained on terms of the closest intimacy ever since. Pascal's faithful Achates and would-be Mentor was but two or three years older than himself, and, having secured the diploma of Doctor of Medicine, some eighteen months previously, was now patiently striving to create himself a practice. The outset of a doctor's career is more beset with difficulties than any other. No doubt, M. Lorilleux already possessed a certain number of patients, but they were patients who only paid under compulsion, or else did not pay at all. They lived on the upper floors of third-rate tenements—often in mere garrets—and he frequently had to climb six flights of stairs to sign a prescription. At home he had two consulting hours, the first of which was gratuitous; the second being nominally reserved for folks in a position to pay a modest honorarium. He might, however, have dispensed with the distinction, for those who called upon him were all equally indigent. Still, he was patient—he was waiting for that “tide in the affairs of man which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.” And besides, he relied a great deal on his knowledge, and his talent, to procure him both renown and wealth. In this he was mistaken. His mind was, no doubt, stored with learning; but, on the other hand, he was wanting in sang-froid, audacity, and swift perception. In his consulting room, he was sure of himself—no one could expound a scientific theory more completely and clearly; but, by a patient's bedside, matters proved very different: he lacked that divining power, that fund of inspiration which only the great and true masters of the healing art possess. And yet, it must not be thought that Lorilleux was a common-place kind of man. His greatest misfortune was, that he had never experienced such a feeling as enthusiasm. Youthful emotions seemed foreign to his nature; it was as if he had been born prematurely old. He was short of stature, and remarkably solemn in manner, exaggerating his professional gravity and dignity to such a point that, at times, he seemed perfectly ridiculous. His clean-shaven, plain face was certainly not the mirror of his mind, but rather a white page on which nothing whatever could be deciphered. Possessed of all the cunning pettifogging instincts of a Norman peasant, he absurdly imagined that every one else was similarly endowed, and

he invariably ascribed some hidden purport to the most insignificant actions. He did not believe in spontaneous impulses. To his mind, people always acted after due meditation ; and he spent a fair portion of his time in rebutting fantastic plots by skilful manœuvring, and in seeking to penetrate imaginary mysteries by dint of cunning and application. His exaggerated fears, and laborious investigations, absolutely embittered his life. He treated existence as if it were a series of mathematical problems, and traced himself a line of conduct, from which he fancied that chance could never possibly divert him. Under such circumstances, his narrow mind and petty ideas could scarcely provoke astonishment. He was quite the reverse of Pascal, who, with a broad, liberal mind, united considerable power of conception and initiative ; for which very reason he was denounced by Lorilleux as altogether a romantic being.

The law of contrast would alone suffice to explain the friendship of these two young men ; but there was something else besides. For several years the doctor had entertained certain views concerning his friend, of which the latter was ignorant. These views may be easily explained. Lorilleux had a sister, to whom he was greatly attached ; and often, in his youthful days, when his schoolmates were busy with their pleasure, he had asked himself what would be her future in life ? Their mother was a widow, and subsisted on a scanty pension, which would expire at her death. One day she must follow the common example of humanity ; and then, what would become of the young girl ? It is very difficult, indeed, now-a-days to find a husband for a portionless maiden ; and all their relatives were so poor that there was no hope of assistance coming from them. On the other hand, despite all his energy and application, Lorilleux could not possibly manage to amass a dowry for his sister, in time for her twentieth year ; and so, how was he to find her a husband ? Whilst he was revolving these thoughts in his precocious mind, the idea occurred to him that his friend Pascal would, in a few years' time, prove a capital match for this sister of his ; and he considered that, with a little skill and patience, such a marriage might be easily effected. "My sister's poverty," he thought, "will not prove an obstacle. Pascal's family is well off, and he, himself, is remarkably disinterested. My sister will be pretty, and modest, and clever. She will make her husband as happy as can be desired, and she will prove the best mother in the world. Pascal will certainly like her ; and besides, if he doesn't marry her for herself, he will do so out of affection for me, so as to strengthen our bonds of friendship by adding a fraternal tie. In this manner I shall assure the happiness of the two beings who are dear to me, and all my actions must converge towards that object."

This, then, is why Lorilleux became Pascal's intimate friend, and why he evinced such a tender interest in the young engineer's welfare. He knew, almost to a farthing, how much his friend's father and mother would leave behind them when they died ; and, one holiday time, he had spent a fortnight in Brittany, with the view of cultivating their acquaintance, and studying their characters—returning to Paris, convinced that *they*, at least, would never raise any objection to the match he had set his mind on. Lorilleux was too prudent ever to allude to the hopes he entertained ; for his sister was still too young, and Pascal had

not yet finished his studies. He must wait till the pear was ripe, and so he waited.

But, in the meanwhile, he lavished treasures of friendship on Pascal, and one might almost have imagined that he was a fond mother petting a spoilt child. It was with the very greatest solicitude that he questioned Pascal on family matters, and notably concerning the number of his aunts and uncles, and their progeniture. For might there not be some little cousin, in some distant convent or boarding school, who would one day prove eligible for matrimony? Lorilleux drew a very long breath of relief, indeed, when, in answer to his artful questions, Pascal stated that he had only two cousins, and that both of them were boys. So there was, at least, nothing to be feared in *that* direction.

When Pascal was admitted to the Ecole Polytechnique, Lorilleux was certainly the happier of the two. How he congratulated his friend! What a hymn he sung in his praise! But, in his own mind, he was murmuring, "Well, my sister will marry an artillery officer!"

However, Pascal secured third honours, and then decided to enter the Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées. Lorilleux, who had influenced this determination, rubbed his hands with delight. "Bravo!" he muttered; "a garrison life would not have suited my sister. I shall be better pleased to see her the wife of a Government engineer."

As such were the doctor's ideas, it will be easily understood how vexed and disappointed he felt, when the young engineer abruptly sent in his resignation, without so much as a word of warning, or a single appeal for advice. In fact, Lorilleux looked on this act of independence as an insult. "What an idea! Who ever heard of any one giving up a secure position, abandoning such a splendid career?" he growled. "Pascal is altogether too frivolous."

Nevertheless, he continued to keep his resentment within bounds. Young Divorne was a Breton, and consequently of an obstinate nature, so that Lorilleux realised it would be waste of time to try and induce him to recall his decision. Any attempt in that direction might moreover lead to an estrangement—a contingency which might for ever crush Lorilleux's hopes. Still he ventured to blame his friend in a paternal fashion, and repeatedly endeavoured to ascertain what were his plans for the future. "Well, what do you think of doing?" he asked Pascal, "There are five years lost."

"Lost, my dear fellow?" answered Divorne; "why, I thought I had turned them to profit."

"Well, but what do you mean to do?"

"You shall see. I have my plan."

"Ah!" exclaimed Lorilleux with vexation; "you didn't speak to me about it."

"Because I mean it to be a surprise."

"Indeed! Well, I can assure you that no one is more anxious for your success than I am. Remember that life is not a novel, save in as much as it is made up of deceptions. At all events my friendship requires that I should tell you my opinion, and that is, that you have acted very foolishly."

II.

UNFORTUNATELY for Pascal, his father entertained precisely the same opinion as Lorilleux. When the news of the young engineer's resignation reached M. Divorne, senior, at Lannion in Brittany, where he practised as a solicitor (*avoué*), it fell upon him like a thunderbolt. All his hopes were blighted. The dream of his life had been to see his son in the embroidered uniform of a State engineer, with a cocked hat on his head and a sword by his side; and to walk through the streets of Lannion leaning on his arm. Now at the very moment when this dream was about to become a reality, Pascal capriciously abandoned his position and sacrificed his prospects, without so much as a word of explanation or excuse.

This was enough to vex any father; and, to tell the truth, M. Divorne was angered beyond expression. He had spent thirty thousand francs on Pascal's education, and he asked himself if, after such sacrifices, a son had the right to abandon his career in life without his parent's authorisation. Although, as a solicitor, he ought to have had the law on the tips of his fingers, he found himself in great perplexity on this point, and he even consulted a colleague to know if a young fellow who had only been able to enter the service of the state, with his father's consent, was legally competent to withdraw from that same service contrary to the parental desire. Alas! he learnt that Pascal's right to act in this disgraceful fashion was quite above question, for was he not already four and twenty years of age? In his anger M. Divorne cursed the legislature for endowing children with such preposterous privileges as soon as they were twenty one; and he, who in other circumstances was such a fervent admirer of the "Code Napoleon," reproached the law with ridiculous want of foresight.

As if his grief and anger were not already sufficiently acute, he was moreover fated to meet with mournful faces wherever he chanced to turn. The folks of Lannion seemed determined to remind him of his misfortune. The news of Pascal's resignation had indeed spread through the town in no time, at once becoming the one great subject of conversation among all the local gossips and scandalmongers. The father was pitied, and the son condemned beyond appeal. Pascal, so the tittle-tattlers said, was a good for nothing, a ne'er-do-well, who would certainly come to a bad end. Really the solicitor was most unfortunate in having such a son, who some fine day would probably disgrace his family altogether. One gossip declared that M. Divorne already looked ten years older than he was, and another almost stated that his hair had turned white in a single night. In one word, if Pascal had ruined his family, committed forgery, and deserved the galleys, he could not have been more severely blamed than he was, so great is the amenity of charitable souls in little provincial towns.

For an entire week Madame Divorne's drawing-room was crowded with visitors. She had never had so many friends before. Every one with whom she was in the slightest degree acquainted discovered some pretext to call upon her, so as to learn the truth concerning this sad

affair, and charitably revive her sufferings. It must be stated that despite all the mock pity evinced for Pascal's parents, a great many people declared among themselves that the punishment was by no means undeserved. The solicitor had always been such a fortunate man, and in little towns of the provinces, good fortune is often looked upon as a crime. One man's success is an insult for his neighbour. Jealousy is harboured in every heart, and fomented many a bitter life-long hatred. Now, at Lannion, M. Divorne was envied more than any one else. People had known him poor, and now he had become rich. Folks recollected the thread-bare jacket he used to wear when he was merely a petty clerk in his predecessor's office, and now-a-days he was the owner of one of the nicest houses in the town. Ah ! he was a successful man, and no mistake. "How wonderfully lucky he is !" exclaimed all those whom exaggerated prudence or notorious incapacity riveted to scanty means, "How wonderfully lucky he is !" The fact is, that a small sum left him by his mother had enabled him to complete his studies, and that his wife's dowry had paid for his solicitor's practice. It was but a scanty practice in his predecessor's days, but it had steadily grown and prospered ever since M. Divorne had taken it in hand.

Among those who considered that the solicitor deserved his present misfortune, one must number several of the fathers of Lannion whom he had often wounded and humiliated by comparing their sons to his. How he had extolled the merits of young Pascal who came home every year loaded with prizes, and always passed his examinations with success ! How proudly he had paraded his parental satisfaction ! And how extravagant had been his hopes ! So what was now occurring was but a well-deserved punishment after all ; and at the same time a convincing proof that the model school-boy is not always what he seems to be. Parents—so the Lannion gossips opined—ought really to be upon their guard against all these young fellows endowed with wonderful aptitudes and an unnaturally ready wit, who, infatuated with their so-called superiority, wish to do differently to their fathers, and finish by coming to a bad end. The phrase has often been repeated : precocious children never turn out well.

However, during an entire fortnight, everyone who had occasion to speak to the solicitor thought fit to assume a most mournful expression of countenance, even when in their hearts they were rejoicing over his misfortune. So goes the way of the world. At the local law-court M. Divorne had to acknowledge pressing compliments of condolence every day, and at the club hand-shakes of consolation were offered him without number. As a natural consequence, his irritation steadily increased ; the more so, as he was convinced that Pascal had committed little short of a crime. He invariably returned home at night-time more furious than ever, and straightway picked a quarrel with his wife, whose blind, imprudent, maternal weakness had, to his idea, caused all the harm.

And yet, after attentively studying the question, he came to the conclusion that the misfortune was, perhaps, not absolutely irreparable. He was seriously thinking of writing to the Minister of the Interior, and of going to Paris to solicit an audience, when one fine evening Pascal, in person, knocked at the door of the house. He had just alighted from the diligence which in those days plied between Rennes and Brest,

He was certainly not expected. When Josette, the old servant woman, who went to open the door, grumbling at the impertinence of any one to dare to knock so loudly at such an hour, recognised her young master, she almost fell back and fainted away. For, as she subsequently related with no little pride, she recognised him at once, albeit that he had greatly altered, and had grown and gathered flesh since his last visit to home some three years previously. As soon as the old woman came to again, she gave vent to an exclamation of mingled delight and surprise, and then, dropping her candlestick on to the floor, she rushed up stairs, calling everyone in the same breath, just as if the house had been on fire.

In the meanwhile Pascal closed the door, and felt his way along the hall, the candle having been extinguished by its fall. "It's I!" he called with a laugh; "It's I. Don't be afraid."

But the servant's piercing shrieks had already had their effect; the drawing-room door was opened, and the solicitor could be heard asking, in a tone of mingled wonder and alarm, "Good heavens! what is the matter? What is the matter?"

So great was Josette's emotion that she was still unable to explain herself; but with maternal instinct Madame Divorne at once recognised her son's voice, and hastened downstairs to meet him. The solicitor was still repeating, "What is the matter? what is the matter?" when Pascal was already in the arms of his mother, who wept tears of joy as she pressed him to her heart. He had made her suffer sadly during the last fortnight, that cherished son; but his mere presence now was a complete justification of his conduct, a sufficient compensation for her grief. He had only to appear, and, by her at least, all was forgiven, or, better still, forgotten.

As for M. Divorne, he considered that professional and parental dignity alike required that he should retain an impassive attitude. Come what might, the principle of authority must not be lost sight of. And thus with some little trouble, but not without making a grimace intended to conceal a tear, he succeeded in mastering his emotion. To be brief, he retained what he considered to be the proper degree of frigidity and severity, and his features preserved an expression of dissatisfaction, even when he kissed this son of his, who had once been all his joy and pride. However, this was the very utmost that he could do in assertion of his paternal displeasure. He felt his anger melt under the pressure of his son's warm embrace, like the snow thaws under the April breeze and sunshine. He was perceptibly softening, and as he did not wish to make an exhibition of his weakness, he pretended that he had "important business" to attend to, and left the house, blowing his nose rather more noisily than usual. Just as if any one could have had "important business" to deal with in such a town as Lannion at nine o'clock of night!

However, the prodigal son had returned home; but, unlike the father in Scripture, M. Divorne had not ordered the fatted calf to be killed. But then it should be remembered that the father of the parable was not a French solicitor!

Pascal remained alone with his mother. After so long a journey, he was dying of hunger, and readily confessed it; and accordingly Josette

laid the table in front of the fire, and hurried to and fro, from the drawing-room to the kitchen and *vice versa*, losing her head every second minute, and making ten journeys for one. Every now and then, moreover, she paused to brush away a tear, or to break a plate—evident and equal signs of her perturbed state of mind. Madame Divorne was sitting in front of her son, watching him eat with the appetite of a man who for two days has only devoured chance morsels in a railway refreshment room or a passing village hostelry. She contemplated him with an air of ecstasy, and would have liked to remain for ever in her admiring reverie. But then an explanation between Pascal and his father was imminent, and it might prove a stormy one. Would it not be best to warn her son, and seek to impress him with the necessity of conciliation? Yes, she must try to be the peace-maker, even at the risk of failing in the attempt, and drawing upon herself the anger of both her husband and her child.

"Your father is very vexed, you naughty fellow," she said; "you cause us—or rather, you cause him—very great anxiety indeed."

"But no, mother, I assure you," stammered Pascal. "Don't be afraid. It will be nothing."

"Still, before acting as you have done, you ought to have warned him; you ought to have asked his advice."

"But I was certain that he would not approve of the course I took. He would have blamed me beforehand, and then, if I had resigned all the same, matters would have been worse still."

"At all events, you must promise me that you will keep quiet when he scolds you. Don't get into a passion. Remember that he's your father."

"Certainly, mother, I can promise you that, with all my heart. But you shall see how right I was in doing what I have done."

"Well, I hope so," murmured Madame Divorne sorrowfully. Whereupon Pascal leant forward and kissed her fondly. With her at least his cause was won. Henceforth she was ready to range herself by her son's side, satisfied that he could not have acted wrongly—so simple is it for a spoilt son to convince a loving mother.

To all appearances, the solicitor did not recover his courage whilst he was out of doors. When he returned home, after attending to his "important business," his expression was indeed less severe than before. He did not mention that terrible affair of the "resignation" at all, but talked in friendly fashion with his son, laughing and joking on all manner of indifferent subjects. Nor did he even speak of the resignation on the morrow, nor on the following day, and yet every one he met during his walks abroad pestered him with the remark, "So your son has come home. Well, what does he mean doing?"

The news of Pascal's return had spread immediately through the town. The carrier's waggon had been seen waiting in front of the solicitor's house, and a trunk and a hat box had been removed from it and carried indoors. A procession of visitors followed as a matter of course; but Madame Divorne thought fit to send word that she was "not at home"—whereby she made any number of enemies, who have never forgiven her to this very day. A few mornings afterwards Pascal thought he might venture out of doors, but before he had gone a hundred

yards along the street, he had already been accosted by five persons, with two of whom he was but slightly acquainted, whilst a third was utterly unknown to him. But all five eagerly offered to shake hands, and hypocritically asked him for news of the "Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées." This experience sufficed. Pascal hurried indoors again, cursing his fellow townsmen, and swearing that he would not set his foot in the street again.

However, time passed by, and M. Divorne seemed to have completely forgotten the annoyance his son had caused him. A prey to anxious uncertainty Pascal longed to provoke an explanation, but his mother always prevented him from doing so. "Wait," said she, "I know your father. He is always very long in taking a decision. He has been reflecting ever since you arrived, and when he has made up his mind you may be quite sure that he will speak to you."

She was right; for, in due course, one morning as soon as the breakfast things had been cleared away, M. Divorne gravely requested his son to lend him his attention.

"Ah," thought Pascal, "so the moment has come at last."

The solicitor was usually a prolix speaker, as the functionaries and *habitués* of the local law-court were well aware; but never, perhaps, did he turn the precious gift of speech to such abuse as on this solemn occasion. He began his address with a kind of invocation of paternal love. Who, he asked, had ever understood the duties of a parent more fully than himself? He appealed to his son on that point. Had he not always given ample proofs of his affection? But then, what had been his reward? This exordium was followed by the enumeration of all the worry and anxiety which children cause. He forgot nothing: neither the uneasiness he had experienced when Pascal was cutting his teeth, nor a special journey he had made in a post-chaise to Paris, at a time when his son was seriously ill. This was the first point. Next came the question of pecuniary sacrifices which occupied more time. The solicitor made a minute calculation of every penny he had spent to bring up Pascal in comfort and to provide him with an education, which he himself had never received from *his* father. Finally, and in logical sequence, he dealt with the recompense he had received for his care, affection, and liberality. He recorded each satisfaction that he owed to his son; praised him for his application to his studies, his general good conduct during his boyhood and youth, and his frequent marks of dutiful affection for his parents. In one word, this address resembled the perusal of a paternal "debit" and "credit" account, with the care, worry, and losses on one side, and the joy, satisfaction, and profits on the other. Until very recently, so M. Divorne recorded, the balance had no doubt been in favour of his son, and he, the father, had with pleasure acknowledged himself to be the debtor. "And now," said he, reaching his peroration, "I hope, Pascal, that you do not wish to change this state of things. You must have reflected since you have been here, and you must have learnt to regret your mistake in sacrificing your career. Recall your decision, apply to the minister, he will not refuse to re-admit you into the state service, and I, on my part, am ready to forgive and forget the very great grief you caused me."

The effect of M. Divorne's address was not such as he had expected,

Pascal remained silent for a few moments as if he were mustering up his energy ; or perhaps he hesitated as to the answer he should give. But at last in a firm voice he exclaimed, " What you wish me to do, father, is quite impossible. My application to the minister would certainly be refused, and besides, I could not bring myself to make it."

" Be it so," rejoined the solicitor with an undisguised air of vexation. " Folks say that it is so easy to make a position now-a-days, and no doubt you have found something better."

" Not better, perhaps, but at all events more suited to my tastes. Believe me when I tell you that I reflected before acting as I did. As for my intentions, my object in coming to Lannion was to acquaint you with them ; and this was all the more necessary as I shall need your help."

" That is really very fortunate. I understand now why you thought of me. And how can I help you, pray ?"

" Before undertaking anything I must procure funds, and I thought—"

" Ah ! ah !" interrupted the solicitor in a mocking manner. " You require funds, eh ? But it seems to me that before sacrificing a stable position you ought to have asked me for my views. If I refused—and certainly I shall refuse—"

" But, father," rejoined Pascal, rather impatiently, " if I am not mistaken, one of my aunts, who died ten years ago, left me in her will some forty thousand francs."

If an old pleader, on the eve of gaining his suit after years and years of pettifoggery, had come to the solicitor and said to him, " I have decided not to carry the matter any further," he would have experienced even less surprise than he did on hearing his son speak in the above fashion. " So you require an account of my stewardship ?" he exclaimed with intense bitterness. " Ah, this is a cruel surprise !"

It was in vain that Pascal sought to attenuate his words. The blow was dealt. He tried to explain his future plans, endeavoured to justify himself, and to state how he meant to employ the money he asked for ; but it was all no good ; M. Divorne refused to listen to him. " What does it matter to me," he repeated, " I don't want to know anything about it."

He had quite forgotten the previous discussion ; Pascal's resignation was buried in oblivion. What the solicitor asked himself now was how could he hope to save this money, which, as he was well aware, his son had, after all, a perfect right to claim. At any rate he must try to part with as little of it as possible ; for a young man would certainly turn such a large sum to no good advantage. " Come, Pascal," he said at last, " I can understand that you may be in want of money ; but still you might have asked for it in a different fashion. Am I a stingy father ? Have I ever refused you anything ? I admit that you haven't abused my liberality. But after all you have been studying very hard for five years now, and perhaps you want a little relaxation ; perhaps you would like to make a tour—"

" No, no, father. If you would only let me speak I would—"

" One moment ; listen to what I have to say. No doubt you are in debt. All young men are."

" Oh ! I don't owe a sou."

"But listen to me, please. I don't ask you for explanations. Now be frank; you require five thousand francs, eh?"

"My dear father—"

"You need more? Well, be it so, you shall have ten thousand." And rising from his seat the solicitor walked towards the door, thus indicating that he considered the interview at an end.

Pascal realised that he must strike a decisive blow. "Father," said he, "I need all or nothing."

"Then let it be nothing," answered M. Divorne in a threatening voice.

"Yes, nothing. Do you think that I'll allow a young madman like you to squander his little fortune?"

"And yet I greatly need this money. It is indispensable for my purpose."

"Ah! it's indispensable, is it? Well, your aunt left you a farm, a farm which is in good condition, and let out on an advantageous lease. Suppose I hand you over the title deeds of the property, what will you do with it?"

"I shall sell it."

"And do you think that would procure you money within twenty-four hours? Why, you must wait for an opportunity, find a purchaser, have bills printed and posted."

"Oh, I'll find a purchaser and post the bills."

"You surely can't be in earnest. Why, what would the people of Lannion think if they saw you sell as much as a franc's worth of land? Do you know what they would say?"

"What do I care?" answered Pascal vivaciously; "I'll go and order the bills this very minute."

M. Divorne knew his son well enough to realise that his determination was inflexible. "Stay," said he, "let me spare you that shame. I'll find the money even at the cost of a sacrifice."

Already regretting his angry impulse, Pascal tried to take his father's hand, but the old man waved him back. "No pretences, pray," said he; and he added in a tone of irony, "I suppose you'll grant me a week's grace?" With these words he left the room, slamming the door behind him.

Madame Divorne had not spoken a word through the whole discussion. She was sobbing on her chair, and Pascal, who had been moved to resistance by his father's anger, felt weak at sight of his mother's tears. Kneeling beside her, and taking hold of both her hands, "Mother, dear mother," said he, "speak but one word, and I'll renounce my plans and try to withdraw my resignation."

A gleam of joy and triumph sparkled through Madame Divorne's tears. How her son loved her! How ready he was to sacrifice everything for her sake—he, who had shown himself so firm but a moment previously. "No, Pascal, no. Follow your inspirations, I have faith in you," she said.

"But mother, dear, I must at least tell you—"

"Tell me nothing—I don't wish to know—should I even understand what you said? Be content with what I have told you. I have faith in you." And as he obstinately tried to speak, despite her refusal to listen, she silenced him by placing both hands before his mouth.

The house wore a mournful aspect during the days that followed. The solicitor was as gloomy as possible, and scarcely uttered a word.

His wife and son only saw him at meals, for during the rest of the time he shut himself up in his private room. On her side, Madame Divorne hid herself to weep at leisure, and Pascal seemed to suffer more than he had ever done in his life before. He longed to leave Lannion, for the sight of his father's vexation and his mother's grief tortured him beyond endurance. If he had only been able to speak of his future plans—but no; all attempts to induce his father to listen to him proved ineffectual, and his mother invariably exclaimed, "I have faith in you," without allowing him to say a word.

At length, at the end of the week, M. Divorne requested his son to step into his private room. "Here," said he, producing a bundle of documents; "here are the accounts of my stewardship. You will now be able to see if I have managed your property like a good father. Read please, and then give me a receipt." Pascal at once took a pen from off the table. "No, no," resumed the solicitor, "please begin by reading those documents." And as the young fellow refused to do so, his father unfolded the papers himself and proceeded to read them aloud, insisting every now and then on certain particulars, or pausing to ask, "Are you satisfied with my management?"

The documents were of great length, and their perusal lasted almost three hours; so that by the time his father finished, Pascal was fairly dying of impatience. "Now," said the solicitor, "here is your money. The sum that is due to you, as you will have seen, amounts exactly to forty-three thousand, seven hundred and fifty-six francs, and sixty centimes. Please count that money, and see if the sum is there."

Pascal was already slipping the bank-notes into his pocket when his father stopped him. "No, no," said he, "I tell you to count the money. I particularly wish it."

It was necessary to obey. "Well now we are quits," exclaimed M. Divorne, "when do you propose leaving?"

"Why, as soon as possible—to-morrow, if I can secure a place in the diligence. I am expected in Paris."

"And you would do wrong to keep your friends waiting."

"But father, I do not want to part from you like this. You are unjust and I—"

"No pretences, please," sternly retorted the solicitor, "leave me. I have work to attend to."

At nine o'clock on the following morning the ostler of the *Hôtel de la Poste* came to warn Pascal that the horses had already been put to the diligence, and that he had only had just time to take his seat before the vehicle started. The parting was a bitter one. Madame Divorne sobbed as if her heart would break, and pressed her son to her bosom as fervently as if she feared she might never see him alive again. Pascal was scarcely less moved than his mother, and could barely restrain his tears. He found it impossible to utter a word. M. Divorne, however, seemed bent on displaying his vaunted "iron will" and "force of character." He not merely refused to embrace his son, but even to shake hands with him; and he affected an air of mock raillery:

"Remember that you have all your fortune with you," he said to Pascal. "When it's squandered, which I presume won't take you very long, you will no doubt do me the honour of remembering me. At all events, I shall have your room kept ready."

With these words still ringing in his ears, Pascal walked alone to the diligence office, and the good folks of Lannion considerably concluded that his father had turned him out of doors.

III.

It was five o'clock on a cold raw February morning when the train which brought Pascal back from his expedition to Lannion steamed into the Gare Montparnasse at Paris. This journey had been a sad one, for in reality he loved his parents, and remorse weighed heavily on his mind at thought of the grief he had caused them. Never had the road appeared so long before, the engine seemed to crawl onward at a snail's pace, and a few brief snatches of sleep were powerless to calm his impatience to reach the capital, where he trusted that work would speedily turn his mind to more cheerful thoughts. It must be added, moreover, that Pascal was not accustomed to carry such a sum as 40,000 francs in his pocket-book; and the thought that he might lose it, or have it stolen from him, caused him no little uneasiness, inducing him, indeed, to keep his hand on the precious roll of notes throughout the journey, so that by the time it was over his arm was fairly numbed. Worn out with fatigue, he entered the waiting-room where passengers have to remain whilst their luggage is being removed from the train, prior to undergoing the inspection of the octroi officials; and he was just intent on stretching his stiff legs, when he heard a joyful voice calling him by name, "Eh, Mousieur Divorne! eh, monsieur, the engineer!"

Turning round in the direction of the iron railing which separates the passengers from the friends who have come to meet them, our hero perceived a stout man with a beaming face, who was making any number of friendly signs to attract his attention. "Ah, so here you are!" exclaimed this individual as Pascal reached his side; "I received your letter, and I was expecting you. Have you made a good journey?"

"Ah, it might have been better," replied the young engineer. "I don't think I should have had courage enough to do what I've done, if I hadn't given you my word, Father Lantier. However, I have the money."

"Hush, in heaven's name, don't speak so loud! Suppose you were overheard? People don't talk about money like that; you don't know perhaps that Paris swarms with thieves and pickpockets. I have taken *mine* to the bank; it prevented me from sleeping as long as I had it at home. However, as you have returned we must now set about turning this money to account."

"Yes," answered Pascal with a sigh; "but we must be careful not to lose the game!"

"Lose the game, with all the trumps in our hands? You must be joking surely. But let us attend to present things; you must come home with me."

"But, my dear Lantier, I shall be causing you no end of trouble,"

"Causing me trouble? A man like you? Really, Monsieur Divorne, I should consider it an affront if you went to a hotel. You must come home and have a good sleep till breakfast time; after that we will talk business. I've found out a capital affair to begin with; but, dash it all, here am I jabbering, and you are tired to death. However, wait a moment while I run for a cab."

If Lantier did not fire an artillery salute in honour of "Monsieur, the engineer," it was simply because he had no battery at his disposal. At all events his house had been turned topsy turvy, and a comfortable warm room, a bottle of old wine, and a bowl of delicious *bouillon* were in readiness when Pascal arrived. "Well, I'll leave you now," said Lantier as soon as Pascal had refreshed himself and turned to undress. "If you require anything you have only to ring for me."

"Oh, thanks; all I require is a little rest. Good night, my dear partner."

Lantier softly closed the door and walked to his own room on tiptoe. "Ay, it's true, it's true," he muttered; "we are partners, and yet heaven knows that I never expected to become the partner of such a man as he is—the cleverest fellow of the Ponts et Chaussées service!"

Jean Lantier, Pascal's partner, is now-a-days a contractor in easy circumstances. He will never be very wealthy, because he is not ambitious. Indeed he intends to retire from business as soon as he can give his three daughters a dowry of 150,000 francs a piece, and reserve for himself a snug little income of 20,000 francs per annum. A score or so of years ago Jean Lantier wheeled a barrow over the high ways; he was a simple navvy in the service of the State. He enjoyed good spirits and good health. He was tolerably good looking, his conduct was exemplary, and he earned no less than seventy francs a month minus the percentage levied for the pension fund, in the advantages of which he hoped one day to have a share. Under such circumstances he was fairly eligible for matrimony and so he married, receiving with his wife a very welcome dowry of six thousand francs in hard cash. Madame Lantier was pretty and good-tempered, and made a capital housewife, so that at first her husband found himself the happiest man in the world. But by-and-by, three little strangers appeared upon the scene, and, as Jean Lantier's salary remained the same, he found it a hard task indeed to make both ends meet. In the first year of his married life he had been able to lay a little money by, and now he had to draw on his savings. "It can't go on like this," he grumbled over and over again; and at last one fine day, despite his wife's exhortations to be patient, he took a bold resolution—handing up his barrow and his shovel, and formally resigning his position as a "functionary of the State."

A portion of his wife's dowry had gone in "first expenses," at the time of their marriage; but, thanks to what they had subsequently saved, the little capital of six thousand francs remained almost intact. Thus provided, Lantier offered a tender for a small contract in connection with a railway embankment, and considered himself very lucky, indeed, when he obtained it. But an apprenticeship is necessary in all things, as he soon learnt, at his own expense; for this first contract cost him half his capital. However, he was not cast down. Realising that his want

of knowledge placed him at a disadvantage, he took lessons of an evening, and speedily became quite another man. In the meanwhile, he did not neglect his work. Two or three contracts he engaged in, resulted neither in loss nor profit; but, at last, he regained the sum that had been swallowed up in his first venture, risked it over again, and steadily increased it until, finally, it was doubled. Thus it happened that, at forty years of age, Lantier had amassed well nigh a couple of thousand pounds of his own, and did not owe a halfpenny to any one. And, in the meanwhile, he had lived comfortably, and his wife and children had never known privation.

It was about this time that he made the acquaintance of Pascal, who had been appointed to superintend certain works which Lantier had contracted for. The young engineer felt friendly towards the contractor, whom he found to be a hard-working, intelligent man, with the one great quality that he could be depended on. In fact, every one who knew Jean Lantier esteemed him; and it was only certain jealous rivals who called him a "spoil-trade"—simply because, when once a contract was signed, he scrupulously carried it out, even on finding that he must lose by it. It so happened that Pascal had occasion to render the contractor a rather important service, and, contrary to the general rule, Lantier showed his gratitude. He had always felt great veneration for the *Ponts et Chaussées* service, and he now transferred the whole of it to the young engineer. Soon, indeed, his admiration for Pascal's talents knew no bounds; he sounded his praises in all directions, and one may add that he really thought what he said. When the contract which brought them together had been carried out, Lantier did not lose sight of Pascal, but frequently visited him; at times, to ask advice on some matter or another, and at others, simply for the pleasure of conversing with him. Indeed, the contractor's friendship for the young engineer ripened to such a degree, that he would positively have thrown himself into the fire for him, if, contrary to probability, there had been the smallest occasion for such an act. However, Pascal's last year of study was drawing to a close, and he was already seriously thinking of abandoning the career of a Government engineer. If he still hesitated, it was because he was too anxious to find some other employment for his activity and aptitudes. He was impatiently awaiting an answer to an application he had made to one of the great railway companies, and none came. What should he do? He was asking himself this question, and revolving every possible alternative in his mind, when, one morning, he received a visit from Jean Lantier, who was in a state of great excitement.

At that moment, the great and famous scheme of demolishing the old quarters of Paris, of pulling down the ancient insalubrious tenements, doing away with the narrow tortuous streets, which proved such a great impediment to traffic, and replacing them by broad and airy thoroughfares, lined with well-built houses, satisfying all possible sanitary requirements, was being actively carried into effect, under the auspices of Baron Haussmann. Entire parishes were receiving notice to quit. Houses fell by the hundred, and, in place of the ill and close-built streets, the dingy courts and alleys of olden times—where the sun had never managed to penetrate—the grand arteries of modern Paris were springing into being,

as if by enchantment. Now, Jean Lantier's dream was to become a "demolisher." The profession of "demolisher" is of modern date, but it numbers many and many a millionaire in its ranks. Still, before altogether risking his hard-earned money in this direction, the contractor was anxious to consult his friend. He had his mind full of the idea, and spoke at great length, giving Pascal any number of particulars. He had already ventured some small sums, in little speculations of the kind—having had an eighth or a twelfth share in certain lots; and he considered that it would be a good thing to go into the demolishing business altogether. In fact, now he thought of it, he had hitherto been altogether too prudent and timid, for, warming up as he proceeded, he declared that, with a little luck, a man might positively double his capital in less than a year's time. "For, you see, Monsieur the engineer," he added, "this is how things are managed. The city of Paris wishes to demolish a certain district, and rebuild it. Very well, then. It needs people to pull down the old houses, and clear the ground. So what does it do? Why, it divides its district into lots of two, four, or ten old tenements, and invites public competition. It says to the contractors, 'Now, what will you give for those old buildings? You must clear them away, mind, and leave the ground in proper condition, for new houses to be erected on the site.' Well, the contractors send in their tenders, and the one who makes the best offer secures the lot. As a matter of course, they don't cut each others' throats—they don't let the prices fall too low; and, providing a man gets one tender accepted out of every five or six he offers, the business becomes a very profitable one, indeed."

"But it must require a large amount of capital," objected Pascal, who was beginning to feel interested in Lantier's talk.

"Oh, not so much as you fancy! The city of Paris gives credit—contenting itself, for the time being, with a guarantee, which varies according to the value of the lot. And, on the other hand, ready money soon comes in. We pull down the old houses, it's true, but they serve all over again, from garret to cellar. Other houses are being built by the hundred, and if the old materials don't suit for the very grand ones, they are just the thing for the cheaper dwellings. The builders and the architects come to you, and you can sell them the stone work, and the wood work, and the iron work. One man will buy your slates; another one will take your staircases; another, your chimney pieces; another, your glass; another, your doors and window-frames. The wood that is too old, too dry, or too rotten, can be cut up and sold as firing; the roof lathes make capital faggots; the bricks can be cleaned, and turned out as good as new, by a process just invented; and even the old plaster can be turned to account."

"Eh! but, Lantier, tell me. When the city of Paris is paid, does a large profit remain? Can money really be made at the business?"

"Money! Why, bless my soul, you can make bushels full and bushels full! Now, you know big Joigny, don't you—the chap who used to work with me? Well, sir, at the present moment he rides about in his own carriage—his own carriage, I tell you, paid for in hard cash. And yet, he used to be but an idle fool, and merely began with a few sous he had borrowed. Ah! if I only had 100,000 francs in lieu of 40,000, and a man like you to work with me, why —."

Lantier paused, for Pascal had a thoughtful look, and did not seem to hear him.

"Ah!" muttered the young fellow, answering his own thoughts rather than the contractor's words. "Ah! it's very tempting."

"What? What?" cried Lantier. "Should you really like to make the venture? That can't be. It would be altogether too lucky for me. But, if you are really in earnest, why, then, I can look on my fortune as already made! I can't deal with big things myself. I don't know how it is, but they frighten me, and so I miss the best opportunities. And, to do the thing properly, a man must make himself a connection, see all the big guns, and get into their favour; but, dash it all, I can't do that. I'm always afraid of looking ridiculous, or of talking bad grammar. But if I only had you with me, I shouldn't care a straw. Why, I'd go and see the Prefect himself, and say to him, 'Now, look here, you want to pull down Paris, don't you? Very well, then. I'll undertake to do that, and this gentleman here, my friend the engineer, will undertake to build it up again, and he'll do it a thousand times better than all your architects.'"

Lantier's enthusiasm made Pascal smile. "You are laughing, eh?" continued the contractor. "Never mind: I'd do as I say. Pulling the old houses down isn't everything. New ones must be built, and that's your affair. And a capital business it is, too! With the materials of three old houses one can build a spanking new one. But, dash it all, here am I rattling away, and perhaps after all the matter doesn't interest you?"

"Listen, Lantier," replied Pascal. "I must consider what you have just been telling me. It's quite possible that I might go into partnership with you as you suggest, and if I decided to do so, I could make up the hundred thousand francs that are requisite. However, to begin with I must think the matter over. Call again in three days' time, and then I'll give you a positive reply."

Lantier punctually kept the appointment, and his heart beat with conflicting sentiments of hope and fear when he presented himself at the young engineer's abode. "Well," said Pascal as soon as he saw him, "I've thought it over. We'll go into partnership. You may consider the matter settled."

The contractor went wild with delight. "Then Paris belongs to us!" he cried; and in his excitement he positively embraced Pascal. "Pray, excuse me," he said a moment afterwards. "It was a very great liberty to take, but, dash it all, you don't know how I feel."

It was then agreed that Pascal should start for Lannion with the view of obtaining the money which was required; while the contractor on his side gathered together his own funds, and looked out for some good affair, for it was essential that they should set to work as speedily as possible.

On the morning that Pascal returned from Brittany he realised that his partner was well acquainted with the English axiom that "time is money," for scarcely was breakfast over than Lantier produced a large sheet of paper on which he had jotted down innumerable figures and memoranda, and using it as a reference he proceeded to point out the necessity of offering a tender for several houses in the Rue de La

Harpe, then being pulled down to admit of the tracing of the Boulevard St. Michel. As soon as Lantier's explanations were given, they agreed to go and look at the houses together, which they did on the following morning. It was late in the day when they had finished measuring and calculating, and estimating the value of the various materials; and then they had to consider how much they should offer for the lot. After a little discussion, they fixed a sum, and that same evening Pascal drew up the first tender of the firm of Divorve & Lantier, public contractors. There was every prospect of this tender being accepted, for their offer was a high one. As it was their first venture, they had decided that it would be best to content themselves with a small profit; and so, making allowance for the chance losses they might perhaps incur on certain materials, they fixed their proposed gain at some thirty thousand francs. The tender having been duly despatched to the proper authorities, it became necessary to wait for the result.

Pascal could not live for ever with his partner, however much the latter might have wished him to do so, and accordingly he went in quest of quarters for himself. After climbing a few hundred flights of stairs, he at length lighted on some furnished rooms, which, although not particularly comfortable, had the immense advantage of being close to the Hotel de Ville, whither his future avocations would constantly call him. Indeed, all the official business concerning the demolitions of Paris was in those days transacted in a long gallery just under the roof of the municipal palace, at a height of one hundred and eighty steps above the level of the soil.

Scarcely was Pascal installed in his new abode than he received a visit from his friend, Dr. Lorilleux, who had at length been apprised of his return. During the past month the doctor had felt particularly anxious. What was his future brother-in-law about? What did he intend doing? Did he mean to return to Paris? Pascal's prolonged absence in Brittany almost drove Lorilleux to despair, and directly he heard that his friend was once more in the capital he hastened to go and see him. As he entered Pascal's rooms he brushed against Jean Lantier who was going away; but he paid no attention to him, for he had never seen him before, and besides, the contractor was merely dressed like an artisan in decent circumstances. "At last!" cried Lorilleux, as he crossed the threshold. "At last I've caught my deserter! The carrier pigeon has come back again after all! And now let me shake hands with you, and ask just one question. Why on earth did you take yourself off so mysteriously? Will you condescend to enlighten your old friend?"

"Certainly I will," answered Pascal, "and all the more readily as now it is too late for me to recall my determination."

"Ah, I understand, I understand. You were afraid of my advice. You dreaded an encounter between your folly and my wisdom. Very good. After such an answer I fancy I can guess what you have been up to: you have evidently been doing something very absurd?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Well then, defend yourself; explain yourself. I am ready to listen."

"Oh, I can tell you everything in a word, my dear fellow. I have become a dealer in old houses; I pull them down and I sell the materials. To be brief, I have gone into the 'demolishing trade.'"

"That's impossible!" exclaimed the doctor. "What, *you*—an old pupil of the Ecole Polytechnique? You must be joking surely?"

"No, my dear fellow, I'm speaking seriously; and more than that—that fat man, covered with plaster, whom you brushed against, as you came in here, is my partner. He had come to tell me that our tender for nine houses in the Rue de la Harpe has been accepted. We shall put workmen into them to-morrow."

Pascal then related the story of his partnership, his journey into Brittany, and his father's anger, not forgetting to mention the forty thousand francs he had inherited from his aunt. Lorilleux listened in bewilderment, constantly raising his arms to the ceiling and ejaculating, "Oh!" and "ah!" as if, for the life of him, he had never heard of such madness before.

"My dear fellow, you have lost your head!" said he, when Pascal had finished his narrative. "It's a bad case, and I'm afraid that there's no remedy. You seem to think that life is a romance, and you act like the hero of a serial tale. When Paul Féval wishes to do one of his characters a good turn he presents him with a million, without having to loosen his purse strings. But in real life people don't pick up millions like that."

"Who knows?" answered Pascal with just a touch of self-conceit in his tone.

"Oh, I see well enough that it isn't advice that you need," retorted the doctor. "What you want is the shower bath. You are a poet gone astray, and yet heaven knows the Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées is by no means near Mount Parnassus. I certainly never expected such things of a mathematician. You don't know anything of life or its difficulties, my poor fellow, and I'm grieved to see that you are going to pay a high price for experience. And yet you might have taken example from me."

"Do you know, Lorilleux, you are not at all encouraging," answered Pascal.

"That's because I speak the truth."

Their conversation went no further on this subject. As Pascal had said, it was too late for him to retreat; and if Lorilleux had persisted in his censorious remarks he would have uselessly wounded his friend. However, the doctor came away from this visit, more vexed than he had ever felt before. His friend's folly would cost his sister forty thousand francs! For he considered the money which Pascal had brought from Brittany as irrevocably lost, and was quite ready to go into mourning for it. The only thing that consoled him was that this experience would probably sober Pascal and bring him back to more positive ideas. Past folly, we are told, is a guarantee of future wisdom. It was better that his friend should squander forty thousand francs whilst he was a bachelor, than ruin himself after marriage. And besides, even when his aunt's money was gone, Pascal would always have a snug little fortune coming to him from his parents. Such were Lorilleux's thoughts, and mindful of the fact that there is no such thing as an unmitigated evil, he reflected, with some little satisfaction that, as matters stood, Pascal would remain under his thumb. And that was a very important point indeed. Had the young engineer continued in

the service of the State he would certainly have been appointed to some post in the provinces, where, unknown to the doctor, he might easily have entangled himself in a love intrigue and have got married without a word of warning. Where would Lorilleux's fine plans have been then? But now Pascal was going to live in Paris, and he, the doctor, would be able to exercise a constant surveillance over all his actions; so that there was no chance of his escaping the fate which his friend had pre-assigned him with such admirable foresight.

With these ideas running in his head it is no wonder that Lorilleux became a frequent visitor to Pascal's rooms, and that he indeed contrived to spend nearly every evening in his company. "How goes the novel?" he would ask from time to time; whereupon Pascal was wont to reply, with unaffected unconcern, "Oh, not badly, my dear fellow, not at all badly."

The fact is, that if the enterprise were romantic, the profits were real enough. The houses in the Rue de la Harpe yielded less than was anticipated, but the gain on others exceeded the amount of preliminary calculations. For instance, two important lots near the prison of St. Lazare—at the point where the new Boulevard Magenta was to cut through the Faubourg St. Denise—proved particularly remunerative. It is true that the two partners were unsparing in energy and activity. Pascal was running about from morning to night, calling on a dozen persons in the course of a morning, drawing up tenders and contracts, besieging the members of the municipal building committee, and taking the offices of the Hôtel de Ville by storm. In the meantime Lantier, often up to his knees in plaster, was busy counting beams and boards, blocks of stone and piles of slates, driving skilful bargains for cash, and wheeling would-be purchasers of the humbler sort over litres of "*petit bleu*" in the wine shops.

The activity which the two partners displayed made Lorilleux reflect. He could not help noticing their jovial air. Pascal had far more assurance of manner, his air of confidence alone bespeaking the successful man; while Lantier, albeit stout enough already, was steadily gaining flesh. "So they are making money," muttered the doctor to himself. "Pascal didn't deceive me. It's positively wonderful. No one ever heard of such a thing before! Well, after all, so much the better. At all events he's working for me, and I ought to be doubly pleased, both as his friend and his future brother-in-law."

Pascal's parents had been the first to learn of the success of his enterprise. They had refused to listen to him when he was at Lannion, but he knew well enough that they would read his letters. Accordingly he wrote very frequently, but only Madame Divorne replied, sending him regularly every week one of those long loving letters which mothers alone know how to pen. As for the solicitor, he seemed to have forgotten either his son or else the art of correspondence, not sending so much as a line or even a message. At the outset Pascal was deeply grieved by his father's obstinate silence, but little by little he grew less worried, for he felt convinced that the solicitor would finish by surrendering, especially when placed in presence of some such convincing argument as a roll of State bonds or a deed of mortgage on first-class property.

And the young engineer was soon in a position to furnish such an argument. Business proved remarkably prosperous, and as the transformation of Paris proceeded, so many old houses were marked for destruction, and so many new thoroughfares were traced out, that the demolishers and the builders alike scarcely knew on which side to begin. Here, on the one hand, the pick-axe felled miles of walls to the ground; and here, on the other, rose a well-nigh unbroken league of scaffoldings. So far, however, our two partners had not gone in for building; they had contented themselves with the humbler, but in proportion equally lucrative, task of clearing away the condemned tenements, and selling the old materials at the highest possible figure. When, after two years' exertions, they cast up their accounts, they discovered that they each of them possessed rather more than one hundred and sixty thousand francs—that is, that they had quadrupled their original capital, or, as Jean Lantier put it, their francs had almost swollen to the size of dollars.

This magnificent result fairly dazzled Lorilleux. He did all he could to doubt its truth, but the figures were there, and it would have been ridiculous to question their accuracy. The doctor's chronic complaint was prudence, and so, when Pascal showed him the balance-sheet of the firm, he asked, "Don't you think you had better pause? Aren't you rich enough? You might lose all this in future speculations."

But Pascal was not at all disposed to listen to advice of this kind. He hadn't begun to deal in stones and mortar, he said, with the intention of abandoning the trade, when it was just in its most prosperous phase. And so Lorilleux had to recall his timid suggestions, and resign himself to the inevitable. Besides, there was consolation in the fact that his sister would have her carriage, which he promised himself he would borrow from time to time, so as to throw a little dust in the eyes of certain sceptical patients, who refused to believe that true talent would be compelled to stalk the streets on foot.

However, Pascal did not think of a carriage, or, at least, he did not speak of one. But as he found his little lodging more and more uncomfortable, he determined to procure fresh quarters, where he might, at least, have elbow room, and surround himself with furniture of a style he liked. He was partial to comfort, and considered that he was entitled to it. Accordingly, he took a flat in one of the grand new houses of the Rue de Rivoli, just in front of the Tour St. Jacques, and was fortunate enough to find that the rent was not more than three times as much as it should have been. It is true that the view was included in the amount, and this view was then one of the most beautiful in Paris. It extended over the garden around the Tour St. Jacques, over the Seine, the Palais de Justice, and the Sainte Chapelle, being limited in the far distance by the picturesque old houses of the Mont St. Genevieve and the stately dome of the Pantheon. Now-a-days, unfortunately, the view is intercepted by those two gimcrack, pretentious edifices—the Théâtre Lyrique and the Théâtre du Châtelet—against whose vicinity their neighbour, that inimitable gem, the Tour St. Jacques, fruitlessly protests in the name of art and culture. As Pascal was by no means anxious to have his rent raised, or to receive notice to quit as soon as he had embellished his new abode, he prudently asked for a lease, and having defrayed the cost of this document, and paid six

months' rent in advance, he swore before the doorkeeper that he would faithfully observe all the rules of the house, and finally found himself "at home." Not that he immediately occupied his apartment; on the contrary, he put a number of workmen into it, and transformed the seven rooms it comprised into three, so as to be able to receive more than two persons at the same time, to stretch out his arms without knocking his hands against the walls, and to sneeze without fear of breaking the clock glass. The landlord allowed him to do whatever he pleased, reserving the right of exacting, later on, a very high price indeed for the damage done to his house.

On the adornment of his new abode, Pascal lavished no less than twelve thousand francs, for which he was able to obtain some handsome furniture, with tasteful hangings and carpets, and three or four bronzes, of a different style to those which are usually found in a swell hair-dresser's saloon. Singularly enough, Lorilleux did not play the Mentor on this occasion. Indeed, far from preaching economy, he almost urged Pascal on to additional expenditure. The fact is he had calculated that the apartment would be quite large enough for a young married couple, and he considered that money would not be thrown away in the purchase of good furniture. If he evinced such a lively interest in the distribution of the rooms, in the colour of the hangings, and the solidity of the chairs and tables, it was because he was, in fancy, furnishing his sister's future abode. So great was his conviction on this subject that he prevented his friend from purchasing an admirable little painting by Boucher, on the grounds that the subject was scarcely a proper one.

About this time the town of Lannion was surprised by rumours that young Pascal Divorne had become immensely rich in Paris. The jingle of his gold had reached the ears of his fellow-townsmen, who speedily opined that he must be a millionaire at least three or four times over. This incredible news had been carried into Brittany by a couple of young fellows, who, after coming to Paris in hopes of making their fortunes, were constrained to return to their native province in impoverished circumstances. They had needed assistance at a critical moment, and Pascal had readily lent them a helping hand. These worthy fellows estimated the young engineer's wealth in proportion to their own gratitude, and so they went about relating that he rode in his own carriage, and lived in a perfect palace. They were at first only half believed, but their statements were speedily corroborated by a third informant—a young man of Lannion, who had gone to Paris to complete his studies, and whom Pascal had obliged once or twice with small sums, borrowed either to keep a pressing tailor at bay, or to defray the expenses of a pleasure party. This young fellow had dined with Pascal on two or three occasions, and he was never tired of extolling the young engineer's "magnificent" abode. The carved oak furniture and the bronzes had fairly turned his head, and he related, in all good faith, such incredible, extravagant stories of Pascal's wealth that the folks of Lannion were altogether stupefied. They half believed that the solicitor's son washed his hands in a gold basin, and slept on a bed of bank notes.

The natural outcome of all these reports was that Pascal, who had been so slandered and derided, was now looked upon as a demigod.

The fathers who had thanked Providence that he was no son of theirs held him up as an example to their own children, and those who had the most persistently blackened him confessed their error with a proper sense of shame. So true it is that no man can have a more powerful advocate in his favour than wealth. After this change of opinion, a perfect avalanche of letters from Lannion fell upon the young engineer. For instance, so-and-so reminded him of their old friendship, and what's-his-name begged him to protect some nephew or cousin who was starting for the capital. Various busy-bodies also wrote to acquaint him with the names of his traducers, and a municipal councillor ventured to appeal to his "good heart" in favour of the poor of Lannion, his native town. This last missive was the only one that Pascal answered—enclosing a bank note for five hundred francs in an envelope, with a slip of paper on which he just scribbled, "For the Poor." Lannion was thunderstruck when it heard of this. Such regal munificence proved that the young engineer's fortune had not been exaggerated, and it was indeed plain enough to all the gossips that he was really a millionaire.

Now that his son was supposed to be such a rich man, M. Divorne became a more important personage than ever. He was looked up to with the greatest possible respect, as if his own brow were illuminated with the aureol of Pascal's wealth. And yet the solicitor was the only person who did not believe in what he styled "so much foolish provincial tittle-tattle." It is true that Pascal had written home to say that he was making money; but was this at all likely to be true? He (M. Divorne) had prophesied that his son would ruin himself, and the prediction was sure to be realised, for a father cannot possibly make a mistake. Thus every day he expected to see Pascal return to Lannion destitute, humble, and repentant, like the Prodigal Son. It was the five-hundred-franc note, which Pascal sent for the poor relief fund, that first tampered with his convictions. Might there not be, after all, some truth in the rumours which were flying about, for now-a-days such surprising, incredible things occur? At the thought that he might possibly have made a mistake in predicting his son's ruin, the solicitor became a prey to conflicting emotions. His head swam, and he did not know whether he ought to mourn over the non-fulfilment of his prophecy, or rejoice over Pascal's success. At all events, it was impossible for him to remain in this state of uncertainty; and yet he knew very well that he must go to Paris if he wished to learn the truth. Now, parental dignity required that he should not initiate such a journey; for he had blamed Pascal so severely that his visit to the capital would be construed as a proof of repentance, as an act of contrition. Fortunately, however, there was a means of overcoming the difficulty. Instead of leaving Lannion spontaneously, he might make it appear as if he only went to Paris at the urgent request of his wife, whose maternal anxiety had been roused by all these rumours concerning her son. Adopting these tactics, the solicitor skilfully induced his wife to urge him to make the journey, and after a little lukewarm resistance, devised merely for form's sake, he graciously acceded to her request. One fine morning, having secretly made all necessary arrangements, he declared that his paternal resentment was conquered by maternal love, and he immediately booked a seat in the diligence to Rennes, whence Paris was reached by rail. No

one in Lannion had been made acquainted with his intentions, for he wished to take Pascal by surprise; but in this respect he was doomed to disappointment.

Pascal was quietly conversing with Lorilleux, who devoted nearly all his evenings to his future brother-in-law, when M. Divorne presented himself at the apartment in the Rue de Rivoli. The young engineer was delighted to see his father, but he was in no wise astonished, for he had long looked forward to this little triumph. Their meeting was most cordial and affectionate, and the stern solicitor allowed his heart to soften, albeit that Lorilleux was standing by, an attentive observer of the scene. At his first glance round the room, he realised that there must be considerable truth in what Pascal had stated in his letters; and he felt a little bit ashamed of what he called his long "firmness." However, he prudently refrained from raking up the ashes of the past, and contented himself with being amiable and affectionate. As he was desirous of information, he gaily recounted the various rumours which had caused such a stir in Lannion, and Pascal, after a hearty laugh over his fellow-townsmen's flights of imagination, proceeded to reveal the truth. He enjoyed, he said, an income of over eight thousand francs per annum, which he had gained in little more than two years. There was, of course, an immense difference between this modest sum and the millions he was stated to possess; and yet the solicitor was none the less greatly surprised. Diving back into the past, he remembered that when he was of the same age as Pascal he was merely a simple clerk in his predecessor's office, at the meagre salary of a thousand francs a year; and he was positively astounded to find that his son had attained such a superior position in so short a space of time. In fact, he declared that Pascal had been making money far too rapidly and easily; and without questioning his honesty—in which, thank God, he had a father's fervent faith—he could not help opining that there was something absolutely immoral about such a swift acquisition of wealth. Ah! where indeed were the golden days when a man had to toil a quarter of a century before amassing more than half of Pascal's present income! After these remarks, he thought that he might venture to revert to the subject of their past estrangement; and so, mounting his favourite hobby, he proved, as clear as daylight, that his son had acted most foolishly in leaving the state service, against the sensible advice of an experienced father. Carried away in this fashion by paternal obstinacy, he added, in a pompous tone, "And even if you did possess the millions which people talk of in Lannion, I should still repeat to you, 'You acted wrongly.' I do not wish to quarrel, I do not desire to be unpleasant; but I cannot, I will not, conceal from you my opinion. It is not because you have proved successful in your new venture that my principles ought to change. They are immutable. Your success has left them as firm as ever. You *have* succeeded, no doubt; but you ought to have failed. You are simply an exception to the rule, and nothing more."

Pascal knew well enough that it would be simple folly to oppose his father's firm, preconceived opinions, and so he graciously nodded assent to everything that M. Divorne said. Besides, he had two adversaries to contend against, for Lorilleux assisted the solicitor with his own eloquence. It was a day of triumph for Pascal's friend; at last he met

a man who looked at life like himself—a man who shared the same prudent views, and disapproved of all romantic conduct. The doctor and the solicitor soon became fast friends, for the more they conversed the more they perceived that their opinions were identical. Lorilleux naturally profited of the opportunity to win the good graces of his friend's father, and he delicately contrived to hint that, as Pascal was so successful, he could not always remain a single man. To his delight he learnt that M. Divorne was in no wise anxious for his son to marry an heiress; all he wished was that he might secure a wife whom he could really love and esteem, quite irrespective of her dowry.

A fortnight speedily elapsed, and the solicitor at last declared that it was high time for him to think of returning to Lannion. "What shall I say to the folks there?" he asked his son. "They are sure to inquire what you are doing, and I can scarcely say that you are a 'demolisher.' Ah! if you had only remained in the State service, you would have had a handle to your name, and a title to put on your card."

These few words fully explained M. Divorne's long vexation. His pride suffered, because his son had not become a "functionary."

"But, my dear father," answered Pascal, "I am still an engineer, remember, and, more than that, an architect as well. As for the gossips of Lannion, tell them, if you like, that I am rebuilding Paris."

"Can't you speak seriously?" retorted the solicitor. "I don't know how it is, but you are always joking. When will you become serious, like Doctor Lorilleux? He understands life, and knows how to retain his dignity. Ah! my dear Pascal, you are a lucky fellow, for you possess a true friend, and few people can say as much."

If M. Divorne was delighted with Lorilleux, he was also well pleased with Jean Lantier. He had at first been rather surprised by the scarcely aristocratic appearance of his son's partner, but Lantier's frank, easy, jovial manner speedily charmed him. In honour of his partner's father, the contractor gave a grand dinner, served at his own house, in such splendid style that the solicitor was positively stupefied. At the outset, he had been far from imagining that this fat little man, who was habitually covered with dust or plaster, possessed such a comfortable—not to say luxurious—home, and could serve such exquisite dishes, and especially such excellent wines at his table.

However, the solicitor at last started for Lannion, but not without having made Pascal promise that he would at least spend a few weeks in the old home every year. Mme. Divorne was naturally delighted to learn that her son's enterprise had proved so successful, and that he already enjoyed such an enviable position. "We shall have to think of marrying Pascal," she remarked; "and I must try and find some good, honest girl worthy of such a husband."

About that time a very similar idea occurred to Jean Lantier. "We are both of us in capital circumstances now," he mused; "but if I'm married and done for, it isn't the same with 'Monsieur the engineer.' Ah! if I could only marry him to one of my daughters. What happiness for her, and what an honour for me! Just fancy! To have the first scholar of the Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées for my son-in-law! At any rate, one may have a try. All three of my daughters will soon be of

an age to marry ; they are all of them pretty and well brought up, and, upon my word, I'll give him the choice among them !”

So thus, Pascal's celibacy was at the same time threatened by Lorilleux, Lantier, and his mother, without his having the slightest suspicion of the various designs that had been set on foot.

IV.

FOR five or six years the greatest events in Pascal's existence were a few visits from his father, and a few journeys into Brittany. He led a quiet, peaceful, regular life, although he was his own master, with “pleasure” within his reach, money at his disposal, and the blood of youth coursing through his veins. Without, perhaps, being of immaculate virtue, he was none the less well deserving of the favour of a mother with eligible daughters. Still, it must be admitted that his exemplary conduct was not entirely of his own inspiration, for though he had no ambition to imitate either the *gandin* or the *petit crevé* (as the Parisians in those days called their young men about town), he might, nevertheless, have perhaps launched forth into some little frivolity, had Dr. Lorilleux not been there to keep him from temptation. The doctor did not content himself with watching over him, like a father might watch over his son ; for he might have been a mother, and Pascal a young girl—so great, indeed, were Lorilleux solicitude and vigilance. Like Argus with the hundred eyes, he was ever wakeful and attentive, and day and night he mounted guard to shield his future brother-in-law from evil. The dragon who was stationed before the garden of the Hesperides was but a sorry sentinel in comparison with him. When once or twice there seemed a likelihood of Pascal engaging rather seriously in some love affair, Lorilleux exerted all his skill and cunning to turn him from his purpose. The doctor was expert in all sorts of little tricks and devices, and, in fact, he was by no means particular what stratagem he employed whenever there seemed a prospect of Pascal allowing his heart to carry him away. Lorilleux looked on the young engineer as a deposit, of which he would have to render due account some time hence ; and so, with the view of keeping this deposit intact, he resorted to all sorts of ruses, some of which were possibly dishonest. However, he had such a high opinion of his own skill, that he fancied his devices had not aroused the least suspicion.

What Lorilleux the most especially dreaded was to see his friend go into society. Parisian ball-rooms are replete with spider's webs, spun by mammas with marriageable daughters ; and unwary, trusting bachelors are oft apt to entangle themselves in the filaments, whilst they buzz round some youthful *belle*, or gaily tread the paces of the *lucky* dance. It is always the same familiar tune—“Will you walk into my parlour, said the Spider to the Fly.” The “detrimental” may come and go without much fear of danger—he is only liable to lose his own heart ; but woe to the really eligible bachelor ! He must look out for man-traps at each step he takes ; and if he only loses his head one evening, it is all UP with him—his fate is settled. He is caught, seized, confused, entangled, bound, and married, before he is aware of what has

happened to him. He has scarcely decided whether he will marry or not—he has barely thought of making a choice, before the fatal word has been extorted from him, with all its inevitable consequences.

The doctor was aware of this. If he were not indebted to personal experience for his knowledge, at any rate he could rely on the accuracy of his informants, and accordingly he did everything in his power to prevent Pascal from availing himself of his wide connection to go into society. Besides, Lorilleux knew well enough that he would not have been able to follow his friend into every drawing-room, and watch his goings on; he could not have availed himself of each invitation that Pascal might receive, for if the young engineer was already well known and esteemed—thus becoming a most desirable guest—he, Lorilleux, the struggling medical man, had no claim whatever to the favour of society. Folks who would readily have invited Pascal had never heard of Dr. Lorilleux, and had undoubtedly no desire of cultivating his acquaintance. Lorilleux realised all this with a sigh, and as it was desirable his friend should not go into society, he determined to find him at least some relaxation, by bringing a form of society to him. Thanks to the doctor's manoeuvres, Pascal's luxurious chambers in the Rue de Rivoli soon became the favourite rendezvous of a number of young men of his own age—men of undoubted culture, of agreeable manners, and all of them more or less noteworthy in some respect or other. It should be added that Lorilleux had been careful to pass them through his sieve before introducing them to Pascal. None of them had sisters to marry.

Pascal allowed his friend to do as he liked. He was not so blind as the doctor thought, for he had noticed all these little manoeuvres, but, as he was quite unacquainted with their object, they had altogether failed to alarm him. The men who the more especially fear tyranny are habitually those whose wills are weak—they realise their own irresolution, and are yet constantly in dread of their liberty being threatened. These undecided folks, who are always wavering between Peter's opinion and Paul's idea, are terrible companions indeed. At the slightest thing they raise the standard of independence, loudly proclaim their intention of revolting, and then, to the stupefaction of those who are unacquainted with their characters, they suddenly subside into abject submission, and do whatever may be required of them. If they marry, you may be sure it is they who will wear the skirts, while their wives don the breeches and exercise all the authority that pertains thereunto.

Now Lorilleux had not to contend against petty revolts on indifferent subjects. Pascal was too sure of his own will and of his capacity to do what he chose on great occasions, to dread anybody's influence. So far from being offended by his friend's conduct, he was grateful for his solicitude. Besides, this style of life was in conformity with his tastes. After running about all day he scarcely cared for fresh excursions in the evening, and yet he was partial to a friendly smoke and chat. His great delight was to enjoy a long talk with four or five friends after the day's labours had been done with; and, indeed, this generally happened every evening, to the great despair of the doorkeeper of the house, who on wet nights was especially indignant that so many muddy pairs of boots should soil his well-waxed stairs.

During the daytime Pascal was absorbed in work, for the enterprises

in which he and Lantier engaged steadily increased both in number and magnitude. He possessed the gift of infusing his own wonderful activity into those around him. He knew how to requite zeal, and never haggled with the people he employed. The result was that his clerks exerted themselves to the utmost, knowing well enough that they would be paid double wages for double toil, and well pleased to increase their own income by swelling the profits of such a liberal employer. Competing contractors, somewhat envious of the rapid success which the firm of "Divoré & Lantier" had achieved, asked themselves if the young engineer were not somewhat of a sorcerer, racking their brains to discover the solution of a problem which may be very easily explained: Pascal's winning manners had endeared him to all he came in contact with, and besides, he knew how to sacrifice a thousand franc note whenever occasion required.

After realising large profits in the "demolishing" business, the two partners determined to tackle the building trade—a very delicate enterprise in which even many skilful fellows come to the ground. But they proved successful, simply because they based their operations on a logical course of reasoning. They did not need to consult any statistical work to learn that in Paris, as elsewhere, there is only a limited number of wealthy people. They knew this already, and they based all their calculations upon it; contrary to the usual habit of Parisian landlords, whose architects are almost invariably employed in raising perfect palaces with sculptured *façades* and tessellated halls. The first floors of these abodes are only within the reach of millionnaires, and a man must even have a decent account at his banker's to be able to reside on the topmost storey. The foolishly obstinate landlords, who persist in rearing these monumental piles, have over and over again been told that only a limited number of persons can afford to pay more than £100 rent per annum; but it has only been so much time and trouble lost.* Some day when these superb palaces are solely tenanted by some insolent grumbling doorkeeper, when the bill-boards bearing the mention, "Apartments to Let," have for many a long quarter been fruitlessly exposed to wind and rain, the disconsolate landlords will no doubt hearken to the complaints of their diminishing purses. By means of innumerable partitions they will endeavour to divide and subdivide the vast rooms; but they will never succeed in turning them into commodious lodgings, and they will always be obliged to ask for a high rent. A good many of them will no doubt ruin themselves at this game, and then the others will begin to reflect. They will prudently give up erecting over-decorated palaces and content themselves with building simple inhabitable houses.

With practical modesty and common sense Pascal and his partner took the latter course at the very outset of their new enterprise. An honest man with a family and an income of less than a thousand a year, could

* These lines, penned by M. Gaborian prior to the Franco-German war, were truly prophetic. His forebodings have been fully realised by the grievous crisis of 1882-1883. The working classes are now almost quite unable to lodge themselves within Paris, and the middle classes have great difficulty in satisfying the exactions of their landlords. Many of the latter have moreover experienced great trouble in finding tenants for their costly piles.—*Trans.*

find a suitable dwelling in their houses; so that scarcely were they completed than they were let, from cellar to garret, at reasonable and yet advantageous rents, which represented some seven or eight per cent. interest on the invested capital. These houses so easily let were yet more easily sold. Purchasers started up on all sides, and the nosegay which the Paris masons habitually attach to the last finished stack of chimneys had barely time to fade before the house it bloomed above changed hands. Thus Pascal was making himself a name as a competent architect, and the capital of the firm was steadily increasing.

This constant good fortune, due to great exertions, great skill and knowledge, surprised Lorilleux prodigiously. As he could not explain it to himself, he fell back on the hackneyed phrase which incompetent fools, vegetating in obscurity, so often repeat anent clever fellows who succeed: "How lucky they are!" he murmured. He himself was *not* a lucky man, as he acknowledged with no little bitterness. He had sown patiently enough, and yet, contrary to the Scriptural promise, he had reaped nothing. Some little deception awaited him every morning. He continually found some error of calculation even in his most skilful combinations. And instead of taking the blame on himself, he cast it on the wayward course of events, as if human skill does not precisely consist in directing events, or, at any rate, in turning them to profit. The doctor had dreamed of wealth and glory, and wealth and glory seemed to shun him. His name was still unknown, and his best patient was a retired druggist who, since he lived in the suburbs and inhaled pure air—so unlike the intoxicating stench of his shop—was quite unable to breathe. By degrees, Lorilleux's character had become most acrimonious. His complexion had assumed that bilious tint which is the outward sign of envy. He had grown tyrannical, susceptible, and impatient. He always looked at things in their worst light, and no longer concealed his hatred and contempt of mankind. On all sides he fancied he could detect tricksters and adventurers who were more skilful than himself, and he deplored that his own powers of cunning were limited. Yet another worry, moreover, disturbed his sleep and clouded his brow: Pascal was decidedly growing very rich. This wealth which had come to the young engineer so rapidly had belied all Lorilleux's previsions, and now it made him very nervous for the future. Might it not prove an obstacle as regards the realisation of his plans? Would Pascal prove as disinterested, now that he enjoyed a large income, as when he only had distant "expectations" to count upon? When success attended each of the young engineer's earlier speculations, the doctor had rubbed his hands with delight; thinking of the good fortune in store for his sister; but now he actually began to hope that some misadventure would occur and diminish Pascal's growing wealth. He bitterly regretted having delayed the execution of his plans so long, and realised that he must now unmask his batteries; not, however, in precipitate fashion, but with all proper care and prudence.

Unmask is the right word. No one in the world was acquainted with Lorilleux's intentions; he had not taken even his mother into his confidence, and his sister, like his friend, was equally ignorant of the design—matured with such profound diplomacy during fourteen long years. What a design it was! The dream of a whole lifetime! With

a prudence above his years, Lorilleux had carefully abstained from allowing Pascal to become intimate with his sister. He knew well enough that young people who grow up together seldom end by marrying each other. Youthful intercourse leads (as a rule) merely to true fraternal friendship, and it was not this that the doctor wanted. Thanks to his precautions, Pascal and Mademoiselle Lorilleux had only just caught a glimpse of one another on rare occasions, prepared with infinite art and dexterity. They had certainly not spoken to each other a dozen times.

Now, however, they must be brought into contact—a serious matter, indeed, although to Lorilleux's idea most difficulties had been smoothed down, and there was but one possible obstacle: his friend's accursed fortune. Pascal was now on the point of reaching his thirtieth year, and was endowed with all those outward qualifications which please the feminine heart. On her side, Mademoiselle Lorilleux was just eighteen; she was a pretty brunette, with a graceful and distinguished air. Thanks to her brother, she had obtained a far more serious education than usually falls to a woman's lot, and yet she was far from being what is usually called a strong-minded woman. Indeed, her nature was soft and pliable, and she was happily deficient in a will of her own—her rigid, far-seeing brother having ingeniously nipped such feminine obstinacy as she might perhaps have developed in the ordinary course of things, when it was but in the bud; behaving, indeed, most tyrannically, but not so much for the pleasure of exercising his authority as with the view of preparing her future happiness, when she would find herself under a yoke less hard to bear than his. When the doctor thought of his friend Pascal—the object of his constant solicitude, and this dear sister—the apple of his eye, he could not refrain from congratulating himself on his work; so fitted did he find them for each other. He united them in fancy, and pictured, in glowing tints, their household happiness, which he meant to be his sole reward.

Having determined to bring matters to a climax, Lorilleux decided that to effect the marriage he was bent upon, he must begin by instilling ideas of matrimonial felicity in Pascal's mind. This was a question of time, and it so happened that the doctor's preparatory labour was greatly assisted by two powerful (although unknown) allies. Madame Divorée had found an heiress according to her heart, and was anxious that her trouble should not be thrown away. In each letter she wrote, therefore, she sounded the praises of the Breton beauty she had discovered, and invariably wound up with some delicate allusion to matrimony. On his side, Jean Lantier—like a tradesman anxious to dispose of his wares—incessantly repeated that it was “not good for man to live alone,” especially as the world was replete with charming girls who had received the best of educations in the most renowned “academies” of Paris—those model schools where the least intelligent of the pupils speedily learn how to make three toilets a-day at the minimum. However, neither Lantier nor Madame Divorée had such frequent opportunities of influencing Pascal as Lorilleux, who, with the view of converting his friend, now resorted to a somewhat ingenious stratagem. He pretended to be himself afflicted with a great desire to enter the holy state of matrimony; and, thanks to this ruse, he had a clear field before him,

for his insinuations were divested of all suspicious character, and became, as it were, the outpourings of confiding friendship.

How cleverly he described the bitterness of solitude, and the loneliness of celibacy ! How enthusiastically he sang the joys of Hymen, and the chaste happiness shared by sympathetic hearts, whose union has been sanctified by the Church and recognised by the State ! Then, in due course, he detailed at length the reasons that had determined him to turn his eyes, at his age, towards matrimony, as the haven of life. A man ought to marry whilst he is still young. It is folly to wait till we are going down the hill, before seeking a companion for the journey. Scandalous indeed is the conduct of those worn-out debauchees, who look to matrimony for a nurse rather than for a wife ! The chaste young girl whom they lead to the altar brings them treasures of youth and virtue ; but on their side, what have they to offer ? A frigid heart, in which the fire of youth has long since burnt to cinders, a depraved and vitiated imagination, a worn-out frame—ruins and remnants of all kinds. And under such circumstances, have they any right to complain of what is so frequently their after-fate ? Ah ! their households often present a sorry sight, indeed, but a twelvemonth after marriage. In England, in America, and in Germany, folks are far more sensible. There, at least, a man marries the woman he loves, and marries her for herself. He is not guided by those shameful considerations which in France transform matrimony into a mere monetary speculation—a simple question of figures settled by the notaries of the contracting parties. No, in those happy lands suitors have a soul above dowries ; and so each pretty, amiable girl readily finds a husband, no matter whether she be rich or poor. It is merely the plain faces that have to resign themselves to singleness, and then only in the event of their having no good qualities to make amends for their lack of comeliness.

This is how Lorilleux talked to Pascal with all the eloquence of conviction. He contrived to present these ideas in some new form well nigh every day. He waxed almost poetical when speaking of honeymoon bliss ; and it really seemed as if he had attentively studied the well-known and ingenious work which, after making the reputation and fortune of M. Legouv   the elder, contributed no little to the literary success and renown of M. Legouv   the younger.

However, Pascal lent but an indifferent ear to all this talk. When Lorilleux described the woman of his dreams—investing her precisely with his sister's charms and qualities—and exclaimed, "It's decided, as soon as I meet such a woman I'll marry," Pascal simply replied, "Do so, my dear fellow, by all means, if it's to your liking."

On these occasions the doctor needed great strength of character not to retort, "Eh, but what about yourself ?"

It is true that Pascal had once or twice forestalled this question which was for ever hanging on Lorilleux's lips. "In all probability," said he, "I shall end by marrying like everybody else, but I am young enough to wait a little longer. I find myself very happy as I am, and a bachelor's life by no means weighs upon me. Besides, now-a-days, a wife is such an expensive luxury, and although I have already been so successful, I don't consider that my means are as yet sufficient to warrant such extravagance. A man must be really wealthy to be able

to choose a wife and not a dowry ; and I precisely wish to select *my* wife quite irrespective of pecuniary considerations."

These last words fairly delighted Lorilleux, for Pascal's disinterestedness was at all events some set off against his nonchalance ; and so the doctor invariably greeted his friend's declaration with the sententious remark, "I agree with you, my dear fellow ; a wife ought to owe everything to her husband." But in the depths of his heart he cursed the women whose fault it was that men opined, "A wife is a luxury, and matrimony is only compatible with wealth." It is this maxim that peoples the convents. The misconduct of a dozen coquettes is the cause of a hundred girls becoming old maids ; for each time that a wife ruins her husband, many and many young fellows swear to live and die in single blessedness.

However, Lorilleux's persistent efforts had at least produced one good result. His assumed desire to marry had become a favourite topic of conversation among the friends who met of an evening in Pascal's rooms. He had sown an idea, which was sprouting, and would soon bear fruit. Things often follow this course among young men who are intimate. It suffices for one of them to take a decision for all the others to follow his example. After all, it is but the old story of Panurge and the sheep. In the meanwhile, pending the outcome of this intrigue, Lorilleux's friends delighted to tease him. "Doctor," said one of them "I've your affair. A charming girl with a hundred and twenty thousand francs and expectations. I know the notary, who can tell you all about her parents' fortune."

"Lorilleux," interrupted another comrade. "Do you know, as I was coming along the Rue de Rivoli this afternoon, I saw the portrait of a most lovely girl in a photographer's window. I'm sure she would suit you. Suppose you go and ask for her address."

Contrary to his previous habits, the doctor took all this banter most good naturedly. "Oh, you have all of you some one to propose to me, no doubt," he rejoined. "There are always plenty of offers for a man of position who wishes to marry. But the misfortune generally is that if he suits the young girls who are presented to him, they don't suit *him* at all !" Whilst he spoke in this supercilious fashion, the artful doctor was thinking to himself, "Laugh, my fine fellows, laugh as much as you like ! The horsebreaker brings his steed if necessary a thousand times in front of the fence which has to be leaped, and although the animal may refuse and refuse again and again, he invariably finishes by taking the jump. And you shall jump, all of you, though where you fall I scarcely care ; but Pascal shall jump as well, and I must see that *he* alights in safety."

Lorilleux had carried his operations to this uncertain and yet promising point when one evening, whilst he and several others were smoking and chatting together in Pascal's rooms, a friend, who had been dining out, arrived all aglow with satisfaction at having at last discovered, so he said, "A capital match for our difficult doctor." The fact is that this young fellow had taken Lorilleux to be in earnest, and had asked five or six old ladies of his acquaintance to search for some marriageable girl with a pretty face and a handsome dowry. The quest had not been a long one, and now he came to ask the doctor if he were willing to be introduced to the

young lady who had been found for him. He would not at all engage himself by simply having a look at her.

Lorilleux listened most attentively to all the particulars that were given him, made a few objections, and finished by refusing the proffered introduction.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed one of his friends, "the doctor is altogether *too* difficult to please. We shall never manage to marry him. If he doesn't wish to remain a bachelor for ever, he has only one resource left: he must apply to Monsieur de Saint-Roch, the providence of would-be husbands."

Every one is at least acquainted by name with the mysterious and eccentric personage who styles himself "the Family Ambassador," and glories in having founded what he calls "the Matrimonial Profession;" so that a burst of laughter greeted the sally which advised Lorilleux to apply to him for a wife.

But the doctor remained unmoved. "And, after all, why shouldn't I apply to M. de Saint-Roch?" he asked, in a serious tone. "Only before doing so I should very much like to learn if he has really ever married *any one* in the course of his career."

"You presumptuous fellow!" cried the author of the proposal. "Surely you don't doubt Saint-Roch's word? Haven't you ever read a newspaper? You have only to look at the first that comes under your hand, and you will be edified immediately. From time to time the celebrated ambassador does not disdain to monopolise the back pages of all the leading dailies. He informs families and eligible bachelors that he holds at their disposal an extensive choice of spinsters and widows, ranging from sixteen to sixty years of age, and all possessed of desirable social gifts—wit, beauty, and birth—with dowries of one or two millions of francs a-piece!"

"Oh! I know all that well enough," rejoined Lorilleux. "I have read that Monsieur de Saint-Roch is honoured with the confidence of the first families of the nobility, the bench, the army, and the financial world. I have read that the princely houses of Europe are in the habit of utilising his services, and I know that in communicating with him it is requisite that all applicants should write their names and addresses legibly; but all this has failed to convince me, and so I return to my question: Has he ever really married any one?"

"But, doctor, don't you know that there are at least a dozen matrimonial agencies in Paris?"

"Perhaps there are; but, after all, what does that prove?"

"Why, that they wouldn't keep open if they hadn't a fair number of customers."

"But, dear me, I've often seen shops that never do any business."

"So you think, then, that the inventor of the 'Matrimonial Profession' spends a couple of hundred thousand francs a-year in advertising merely to amuse himself—simply to have the pleasure of seeing his own name in print above a self-laudatory prospectus?"

This remark seemed convincing to Lorilleux, and he acknowledged his defeat. However, the conversation continued. Admitting that Monsieur de Saint-Roch did marry people, who were his usual customers? What class did they belong to? How did the "Matrimonial Ambassador" go

to work? What was his system? Such were the questions that Pascal's friends asked each other, without being able to answer any one of them.

"Well, gentlemen," at length observed one young fellow, "let me make a confession. Do you know that more than a dozen times I have really thought of writing to Monsieur de Saint-Roch?"

"Good heavens! You don't mean it!" ejaculated Lorilleux. "What object could you have had in doing so?"

"Oh! I was merely influenced by curiosity."

"I've had the same idea," exclaimed Pascal. "There is something mysterious about the man. He fairly puzzles me."

"But if that's the case," objected the doctor, "you oughtn't to write to him—you ought to call on him."

"Ay," remarked one of the friends, "that would be much more interesting and instructive."

"Very well, then," resumed Pascal, with a laugh. "As such is the case, I'll satisfy your curiosity and mine at the same time. Upon my word, I'll pay this mysterious man a visit."

Forgetful of what he had said a moment before, Lorilleux made a gesture of vexation. "That's a fine project," he exclaimed, shrugging his shoulders. "I recognise you there all over, Pascal."

"Do you know of any reason why I shouldn't go?" asked the young engineer, in all simplicity.

"Oh, no—not at all. Go by all means, if it amuses you. Only, I scarcely think that it is becoming to call on a man with the express object of turning him to ridicule. Such childishness is scarcely in keeping with our age."

The doctor could say no more, for the others loudly denounced him as a "spoil fun." "It's agreed!" they cried. "Pascal shall go on a voyage of discovery. If he's satisfied with what he sees and hears, why, we'll all of us give our custom to Monsieur de Saint-Roch."

V.

THE founder of the "Matrimonial Profession" resides on the first floor in a magnificent house at the corner of two of the most fashionable streets of the *Chaussée d'Antin*. His spacious apartment counts no fewer than sixteen front windows, embellished with remarkably gorgeous curtains, which, when viewed from outside, convey the impression that this must be the abode of some extremely wealthy man. The choice of the house denotes a master mind. There are two main entrances, approached by two different streets. Two separate grand staircases conduct to the "Ambassador's" dwelling; and after a little search one can indeed find a servant's staircase and a dark passage communicating with even a third thoroughfare.

In his advertisements, Monsieur de Saint-Roch lays especial stress upon these three approaches—which, he declares, enable his clients to call upon him "incognito." There is no misplaced pride about the "Ambassador." He is by no means anxious that his visitors should herald their approach by sound of trumpet or of drum. As an excuse or a pretext for their presence in the house, his masculine clients can

avail themselves of the fact that a banker resides on the second floor ; whilst, for the convenience of those of the fairer sex, a fashionable dress-maker has her *salons* on the third storey. This mysterious house has no doubt at least two doorkeepers—for there are two main entrances—and yet no visitor has ever caught sight of one. No inquisitive eyes measure you from head to foot as you pass in or out ; no querulous voice ever inquires, “ Eh, where are you going ? ” Such a question, point blank, might at times greatly embarrass the visitor. Matters are therefore managed differently. So as to dispense with all inquiries and directions, *viva voce*, the walls are ingeniously decorated with inscriptions which conduct the stranger wherever he may be bound—whether to the banker, the dressmaker, or the Matrimonial Ambassador. These directions, indited in gilt letters on a black ground, are most precise, so that no mistake can possibly be made. You may enter the house as if it were your own, and indeed this is how Pascal entered it one morning shortly after the conversation we have just recorded. Guided by the inscriptions, he climbed the stairs to the first landing, where he found three doors, on each of which figured a glittering brass plate, bearing the Matrimonial Ambassador’s name.

He hesitated for a moment, and then rang at the door nearest to him. The vibration of the bell had scarcely died away when the portal opened, and he found himself face to face with a superb lackey, whose livery was as resplendent as the costume of a cathedral beadle. “ Monsieur de Saint-Roch ? ” asked Pascal.

“ If monsieur will take the trouble to follow me,” respectfully answered the lackey, “ I will shew him the way in.” And raising a damask door curtain, he preceded Pascal into a passage, carpeted with velvet pile, and lighted by windows fitted with dull glass. Pascal laughed to himself as he walked on. He was thinking of the advertisements which depicted the Ambassador’s dwelling as a most fantastic abode, with mysterious entrances, secret staircases, and dark passages. “ For the *tout ensemble* to be perfect,” thought he, “ the servants ought to be deaf and dumb.”

At this moment the footman shewed him into a little *salon* hung with pale lilac reps, and remarked, “ If monsieur will take the trouble to sit down, I will acquaint my master with his arrival.” So saying, he touched a little alarm placed on the table in the centre of the room, so that it sounded three times.

“ Shall I have long to wait ? ” asked Pascal.

“ This alarm informs my master that monsieur is waiting for him in the lilac drawing-room,” answered the servant with a bow. “ My master will speedily join monsieur.” And then with yet another bow, the lackey discreetly withdrew, noiselessly closing the door behind him.

“ The d—e,” thought Pascal, “ it seems there are drawing-rooms of all manner of colours here ! Well, let’s have a look at this one.”

To say the truth, this lilac drawing-room was a little marvel of garish ostentation and bad taste. Everything therein was gilded, from the mouldings of the ceiling to the arms of the chairs. There was a great display of Berlin wool-work on the backs of the settees, and the figured carpet representing Madame de Pompadour at her toilette (or something of the kind, the designer of the cartoon, alone, could speak with exacti-

tude) was as grotesque as such things usually are. The walls were hung with a motley collection of paintings and engravings; and four or five *étagères*, together with the tables and the mantel-shelf, were crowded with innumerable knick-knacks and *bric-à-brac* in bronze, plaster, marble, china, carved wood, and so on, the collection being as miscellaneous as that of a curiosity shop. Among the lot there was perhaps one good painting, with two or three others of tolerable merit, and a few decent bronzes from Barbedienne's; but all the rest was simply vile. Such daubs and smudges—such ignorance of drawing and perspective; and among the statuettes, such a lack of proportion, symmetry, and grace!

Pascal went from one object to another—bewildered by their wonderful variety and disgusted by their glaring defects. There was an inscription to each of them. "To our good friend" might be read on one; "To the author of my happiness" appeared on a second; while a third bore the words, "From a happy mother," and a fourth announced itself as a "Token of priceless gratitude." These objects of art were therefore gifts; but who could they have come from? With this question on his lips, Pascal continued his scrutiny, pausing at last in front of the timepiece on the mantel-shelf. Here his amazement reached a climax, for above the dial appeared a chubby Cupid blowing over a lighted brasier, whilst on a highly ornamental scroll the following inscription was engraved:—"Thus shall our flame be fanned by Love."

As Pascal stood in front of this enigmatical timepiece, lost in astonishment and conjecture, he heard a door behind him softly open, and on turning round he perceived the Matrimonial Ambassador in person crossing the threshold of the room. M. de Saint-Roch was a plump little man, with a remarkably fresh complexion—all the lilies and roses which perfumers sell in pots and flasks blooming most vividly on his clean-shaven cheeks. Between his parted lips one could detect a double row of pearl-like teeth—perfect *chefs d'œuvre* of the dental art—and his eyes were as gay and as soft as a madrigal. His whole person, moreover, exhaled the most penetrating perfumes, musk and opopanax, bergamot and ottar of roses, being blended as it were into one powerful emanation, so that he positively seemed to be a peripatetic sachet or scent-bag. His movements and gestures were, for juvenile grace and affectation, well worthy of one of Watteau's shepherds, and Vestris herself would have admired the manner in which he stretched his leg. His waistcoat was a souvenir of the first Empire; and his dress coat, of the once fashionable blue-bell shade, with long-pointed tails and richly chased gilt buttons, seemed as it were a relic of bygone elegance. Breeches would have been the right accompaniment to such a coat, but the Ambassador (no doubt through fear of being taken for a footman) had with a pang resigned himself to wearing trousers. His feet, scarcely as small as his aristocratic cognomen demanded, were encased in sealskin shoes, ornamented with diamond buckles, while his flabby, hairy hands were half-hidden by ruffles of Malines lace. To all appearance, he was passionately fond of jewellery. He scintillated like the sky on a clear frosty December night. Rings upon rings encircled his fingers, a huge diamond pin fixed his neck-cloth, and party-coloured studs well nigh as large as brooches glittered beside his shirt-frill. A couple of gold chains birdied his

neck, and a third encompassed the front of his waistcoat, for the Ambassador, be it noted, never wears fewer than three watches at the same time. The trinkets appended to the chains formed quite a museum of themselves. It is true that "His Excellency" did not wear earrings, but his curly flaxen wig was in its way a perfect poem. In this radiant style did he appear on the threshold of the lilac drawing-room to the wondering eyes of Pascal Divorne.

The Ambassador did not seem over proud of the impression he created. His vanity was no doubt quite *blasé* in this respect; but as his new client's surprise seemed very like excessive timidity, he set about reassuring him, and remarked, with a river-like ripple in his tone, "I see that you are examining my poor votive offerings, monsieur."

"Votive offerings!" ejaculated Pascal in utter amazement.

"I employ that expression," rejoined the illustrious negotiator, "because all the objects you see here have been offered me by grateful clients. Fair hands worked the tapestry of these arm-chairs for me, and I look on those bronzes and paintings as tokens of imperishable recollections."

Pascal bowed. Words failed him to express his astonishment.

"I love to surround myself with these pious gifts," continued the Matrimonial Ambassador. "They constitute my dearest treasure, the recompense I prize the most. Those which you see here are but a few out of the many, for I have seven other drawing-rooms which are equally replete."

"I conclude that you must have married a very great many people in your time, monsieur," remarked Pascal.

"About one-third of France," replied M. de Saint-Roch, with a modest air. "A good many folks are unaware of all they owe to my services. Many have forgotten me."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, monsieur, it is so." And the Ambassador heaved a despondent sigh. "Ah! I have had to deal with many ungrateful people. Would you believe it? Some years ago the purity of my intentions was questioned, and actions were brought against me. But solemn judgments were recorded in my favour, and I have had them printed, together with the speeches of ten advocates, who, at various periods, pleaded for me. I have the written opinions of some of the greatest juriconsults in France confirming the morality and legality of my profession. I have also. . . But after all are not the presents you see here eloquent arguments on my behalf—do they not furnish a convincing proof of the services I have rendered to mankind?"

"Oh, monsieur," interrupted Pascal, "believe me, I never had any idea of questioning your honour."

But M. de Saint-Roch scarcely seemed to hear him. "Fortunately, said he, "there are not merely ungrateful folks in the world. That little group which you see there on the left was sent me this very morning by a young couple I married last year. That painting on the right comes from two other clients, whose union I negotiated four years ago. Ah! I am very pleased indeed with them. They have already five children, and I have been chosen as the godfather of the last one—a little girl, born a few days ago. Yes, I am happy to say there are still many

wives and husbands who have kept me a corner-place in their hearts. They write to me and inform me of all the good fortune that befalls them, and should a little cloud darken their life, should there be any passing dispute between them, they submit the matter to my arbitration, and I soon succeed in bringing them to peace."

"That redounds greatly to your credit, monsieur," observed Pascal.

"Ah!" rejoined the Ambassador, "Ah! if time were not so short, my ambition would be, not merely to ignite the torch of Hymen, but to keep it burning with a pure brilliant flame! I should like to establish an Insurance Company, so that young husbands and young wives might insure themselves against all matrimonial tiffs and squabbles. The conflicting parties would have to lay their little complaints before a mixed jury, composed of persons of either sex, and after due judgment, skilful negotiators would have to bring the erring wife or husband to reason. But excuse me, I am trespassing on your time, monsieur. Will you do me the favour to walk into my private room." So saying, the Ambassador drew aside with a dancing-master's flexible grace, and motioned Pascal towards the door.

M. de Saint-Roch's sanctum is like most other private rooms devoted to the transaction of business, and were it not for the absence of dust and cobwebs, a solicitor would find himself quite at home therein. The Ambassador's servants, be it noted, are the sworn enemies of all other spiders but their master, and they are moreover most expert with their feather brooms, in dusting the ornamental cardboard boxes which garnish the innumerable pigeon-holes running right round the room.

The negotiator condescended to advance an arm chair for Pascal's accommodation, and then seated himself at a large work-table, covered with files and bundles of papers duly secured with red tape.

"Monsieur," said Pascal, "I have ventured to call upon you because I desire to marry and wish to find a suitable wife."

"Very good, monsieur; good, very good!" ejaculated M. de Saint-Roch. "You have had a happy inspiration. Marriage, monsieur, is the real object of life. I have a right to say so, for am I not the renovator of matrimonial institutions? I have reminded man of the scriptural command which bids him take a wife. If I am not a father of a family myself, it is because the sacred functions of my ministry compel me to remain a bachelor. Like a confessor, I am forced to vow myself to celibacy. I am acquainted with so many secrets which I must preserve intact, and we know that a loving husband can scarcely keep a secret from his wife. Had I married, I might have divulged some mystery amid the outpourings of love, and the consequences might have proved disastrous for my clients. But I have remained a bachelor, and my only confidants are my own heart and mind."

"Oh, monsieur, I have perfect trust in you."

"'Loyalty and Discretion,' such is my motto! Ah! you have acted rightly, and no mistake, in applying to me. How are marriages usually arranged in society? Of course there are a few exceptional cases, but in the vast majority of instances chance does usually all the work, or else you are married off-hand, by some relative, friend, or mere acquaintance.

Old women are inveterate match-makers, and their competition is most disloyal! What guarantee do these marriages—arranged

in society—offer? How far are the positions of the contracting parties controlled? You are all confidence, and you walk to the altar with closed eyes. If you are over delicate, or over generous, a little too pliable, or a trifle weak minded, you may be sure that your failing will be turned to account. For instance, to begin with, you are promised a mountain of gold, and at the last moment you learn that you will receive nothing at all! However, you have engaged your word, false shame holds you back; and although furious at heart, you are afraid of public scandal. As you lack the necessary energy to say ‘No’ and break off the match, you finally bow your head and submit to the deceit.”

“No, no,” interrupted Pascal with a gesture of dissent.

“Oh, I know that there are exceptions,” replied M. de Saint-Roch. “But the point that I wish to establish is that I, myself, neither take people by surprise nor deceive them. You may have all the papers and documents I furnish, verified by your own notary, without binding yourself to anything whatever. And it is because I act so loyally, so straightforwardly, that I have won for myself such a high immaculate reputation.”

“I understand that,” rejoined Pascal, somewhat impatiently. “But would it not be desirable to deal with my business at once?”

“Quite so, my dear client; but it was as well that I should give you these needful explanations.”

Thereupon Pascal’s examination began. He was questioned at length concerning his name, age, profession, parents, residence, fortune, and character. His preferences and tastes were carefully inquired into—indeed, no essential point was forgotten; and whilst he spoke the negotiator took copious notes of everything he said. At length the interrogatory came to a close. “Well, you may sleep in peace, my dear client,” exclaimed M. de Saint-Roch, “I shall find something to your measure before long.”

“What?” rejoined Pascal in surprise. “Before long? But I thought it would be at once.”

For just half a minute the Ambassador looked extremely shocked; and then, in a semi-jocular tone, he remarked, “Why, what a hurry you are in! Ah, boiling, bubbling, seething youth! You imagine that a marriage can be concluded like that, do you?”

“Excuse me, I thought

“You thought that I had a wife all ready for you in one of those cardboard boxes. But come, let us talk seriously. To-day is Thursday, so call again on Wednesday; between now and then I shall have occupied myself about you.”

So saying M. de Saint-Roch rose to his feet as if to indicate that the audience was over; and at the same moment an alarum could be heard vibrating in an adjoining room. “Ah!” exclaimed the Ambassador, “some one is waiting for me in the pink saloon.”

“Well,” said Pascal, “I will return on Wednesday.” And with a bow he walked towards the door.

“Not that way, not that way!” cried the illustrious negotiator. “The d—e! you might meet some one, and in my rooms the rule is that one client ought never to meet another. The house is so arranged to prevent such encounters. Twenty persons might call on me, well-nigh

at the same moment, and each of them would fancy he was alone. However, come this way."

He thereupon opened a door cunningly concealed behind a stack of pigeon-holes, and confided Pascal to a servant, who led him along a dark passage to a side street.

That same evening the young engineer related to his friends the various incidents of his visit to the Ambassador, and his narrative had a very great success indeed. However, it was unanimously decided that as this was only the first act, Pascal ought to return to the Chaussée d'Antin on the following Wednesday, so as to see what would come of the adventure. Even Lorilleux expressed this opinion, for he considered that the Ambassador's matrimonial exhortations would serve his own cherished purpose.

Pascal was therefore punctual to the appointment. On this second occasion he was introduced into a green saloon, decorated after precisely the same style as the lilac drawing-room. He had no occasion, however, to kill time in scrutinising the "votive offerings," for M. de Saint-Roch made his appearance almost immediately. Judging from the manner in which he received Pascal, he had evidently been impatiently expecting him.

"Ah!" said he, "I've been thinking of you. You are really a very worthy young man, and I must pay you all my compliments. Why are my other clients not like you?"

"Not like me? What is the difference, pray?"

"Eh? Why, you are too modest, my dear sir. You did not tell me that you were so well off. You said that your father possessed an income of ten thousand francs a year, and that his practice would perhaps sell for forty thousand. But it is worth more than twice as much, and his income is nearly double the figure you gave me. His farm of Kerpris alone brings in twelve thousand francs a year. And besides, he has some magnificent timbered land near Guingamp, and some magnificent meadows along the margin of the Trieux."

Pascal was fairly astounded. What, this man knew more about his family affairs than he knew himself! How could M. de Saint-Roch have obtained this information?

"But that is not all," continued the founder of the Matrimonial Profession. "You stated that your own private fortune amounted to three hundred thousand francs, but you possess more than that. Your friend, Dr. Lorilleux, goes about everywhere saying you are worth twice as much; but your partner, M. Lantier, fixes the right figure at four hundred and fifty thousand."

"How do you know all that, monsieur?" asked Pascal with mingled wonder and impatience.

"Eh, eh!" replied M. de Saint-Roch with a laugh. "Why, I have made inquiries, of course."

"Inquiries, indeed!"

"Oh! don't get angry. But come, tell me, did you imagine that I marry people without knowing anything about them? That would be nice work indeed! But no, let me tell you, I acquaint myself fully with everything that has befallen my clients since their birth. I am better acquainted with your career than even your best friend is—and if I am

not mistaken your best friend is none other than Dr. Lorilleux, who prides himself so much on his knowledge. For instance, I can tell you something which you hid from him most jealously, which he tried to discover over and over again with no result—in one word, I know why you resigned your position in the State service some six years ago.”

“Oh! as for that, I fancy not.”

“You fancy not, indeed! Well, let me tell you. You did not resign so much because you wished to go into partnership with M. Lantier, as because you wished to remain in Paris. You knew that if you remained in the State service you would be appointed to a provincial post, and you were anxious to stay in Paris at any price. Shall I tell you why? You know as well as I do that what I say is true. There was a secret little love affair—a little romance, the prologue of which you had just been sketching, and, according to what I have learned, you were desirous of carrying the plot a trifle further —”

Pascal flushed scarlet. He felt almost frightened. “Dear me!” thought he, “is this man a sorcerer or a detective from the Préfecture in disguise?” He already regretted his visit to the Ambassador, and it needed but little more to make him positively angry.

“However, I know that it all came to nothing,” resumed M. de Saint-Roch. “You became immersed in your enterprise with M. Lantier—the romance was forgotten. Besides—pray don’t be disturbed—this room here is a confessional box, as it were. I receive my information under the seal of secrecy. The responsibility that weighs upon me is tremendous, but I would not share it with any one for worlds. You may ask how it is I have never thought of training a pupil to my profession so as to have a successor. I will tell you. I can guarantee my own discretion under any circumstance, but how can I be sure that another person would be equally discreet? When once the mysteries of my profession were revealed to him, he might turn them to some ignoble use; and so I have determined to carry my secrets to the grave with me. My office, my notes, correspondence, and guarantees will all be annihilated at my death, and the Matrimonial Profession will subside once more into infancy and obloquy.”

He spoke these last words in a tone of deep emotion, and his painted face wore an expression of positive grief. Pascal did not know whether he ought to laugh or get angry. Was the Ambassador a charlatan or a man of convictions? “What an actor!” thought the young engineer.

By degrees, M. de Saint-Roch’s lips were curved once more into their usual smile. “Now,” said he, “let us talk of yourself. You are young, good-looking, agreeable, well-educated, and wealthy, so that you can be easily married. The affair will be soon concluded. Now, answer me as you would answer your confessor. I know that you have hitherto been a very successful speculator; well, do you mean to make a speculation of your marriage. Are you anxious for a very large dowry?”

“Money is a very nice thing,” answered Pascal, “and certainly I don’t under-rate its value; but I should like to marry a woman I could love.”

“Yes, you are in the right. At times I have to negotiate matches which are mere speculations, but I only do so with reluctance and dis

taste. Well, we will say, then, a fortune on a par with your own, and a wife capable of inspiring affection."

"Yes, those are my views."

M. de Saint-Roch rose, took a huge register from an adjoining stand, and laid it on his table. "I have there," said he, "the names of the richest and most charming heiresses of France and abroad, with full particulars concerning their fortunes, character, and appearance."

Pascal stepped forward to glance at this catalogue of the moneyed belles of Europe.

"Oh, you may look!" exclaimed the Ambassador. "You will not understand anything. All my registers are written in hieroglyphical characters, invented by myself, and which I alone can decipher."

Whilst speaking, he turned over the leaves of the volume. "Fifteen hundred thousand francs!" he remarked. "That's too much. One hundred thousand francs. Not enough. Ah! here—but no, the husband must be a nobleman—a baron at the very least; and here, again, he must be a military man. How singular some parents are in their tastes! Ah! here, perhaps: a million francs in cash—a widow, fifty-three years old."

"Much obliged," exclaimed Pascal, with a laugh. "I should like something rather younger."

"No doubt, no doubt. Let us look further on. Here the husband must be competent to carry on the business of his wife's father, at a factory in the provinces. Here is a young lady who makes a special condition that her husband sha'n't smoke. She is very exacting, and she has no dowry worth speaking of. Here is another, who wishes her husband to be fair, and unfortunately you are dark. What a pity! for she has a fine fortune. Ah! here is one of my best clients—a widow. She has already been married three times, and always by my intervention; twenty-nine years of age; five children."

"Oh! we may pass her by," interrupted Pascal, with another smile.

"Well, perhaps this would suit you: two hundred thousand francs; eighteen years of age; excellent education; highly honourable family."

"Yes, that might do."

"The more so as I have only given you the amount of the 'money down,' for there are expectations—very fine expectations, indeed. The mother is rather advanced in years; she is always in very bad health—you understand; and all the fortune is on her side. As for the young lady, she is really very pretty, tall, well-proportioned, and fair-haired. To tell you everything, I fancy that at times she has rather a hasty temper. The servants never remain in the house for more than a couple of months."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, such is the tenor of my private information; and of course when one marries it is for rather longer than a couple of months. In this case, moreover, the young lady's parents wish their son-in-law to reside with them."

"Thank you all the same, but that won't do; and, must I confess it, I should prefer a brunette to a blonde."

"Very good." And M. de Saint-Roch continued turning over the

pages of his register. "Ah! here's something else," he suddenly exclaimed; "and I fancy it will suit you exactly. The young lady is a brunette, as you desire, and positively charming in all respects. She is twenty years of age, and has never been to school; educated at home—and remarkably well-educated too—the mother being somewhat exacting. The young lady is amiable and sprightly, but not coquettish, and she knows how to keep a house. The father was a cotton spinner at Roubaix, and retired from business three years ago. He is an excellent worthy man, an easy dealer, and fairly indulgent. His fortune is mainly in house property, worth nearly a million francs; but he would give his daughter three hundred thousand francs or so in cash."

"Let us stop there," said Pascal, "I don't think we could find better."

"No, I think not," replied M. de Saint-Roch. "I am certain that the young lady will please you. I can't absolutely guarantee the figure of the dowry, it might perhaps be fifty thousand francs more or less, for the father has lately been a little pressed for ready money having invested large sums in house building."

"Never mind—I have told you my ideas—I am not a money grubber, and a little more or less is of no account. Now, what is this young lady's name, and when shall I see her?"

"A little patience, please. You shall know her name when necessary, and you shall be speedily introduced to her. There only remains a little formality to be dealt with—the simplest thing in the world."

So saying, M. de Saint-Roch handed Pascal a little printed form which he asked him to be kind enough to sign. By the terms of this document, the young engineer undertook to pay the Ambassador a commission of five per cent on the amount of the dowry of Mademoiselle — on the day after the wedding. A blank space was left for the young lady's name.

"Ah! ha! thought Pascal, "So this is the bottom of the bag—shall I sign this form or not? After all I don't fancy my signature will ever cost me a single *sou*." And so, taking the pen which M. de Saint-Roch offered him, he inscribed his name in his best handwriting, at the bottom of the document.

The Ambassador then took the pen in his turn, appended his signature beside Pascal's, and, in the blank space reserved for the young lady's name, inscribed "Antoinette Gerbeau."

"Antoinette," remarked Pascal; "I rather like the name."

"That is a happy omen," answered M. de Saint-Roch graciously. "You will soon have news of me."

He then bade Pascal good-day, and dismissed him by way of the mysterious door behind the pigeon-holes, as on the occasion of their first interview.

The young engineer's friends made merry over the earlier part of this second audience, when Pascal described it to them that same evening, but the finish was not so much to their liking. They were far from being pleased with the story of the printed form and the signature, which showed that Hymen's agent, despite his poetic wit, and blue bell coat with the gold buttons, was after all but a vulgar man of business. They almost unanimously declared that they would have forgotten

their signature in his mysterious laboratory, and they decided that, as M. de Saint-Roch was so exacting, they would not honour him with their custom. Lorilleux profited of the occasion to revert to his original opinion, affirming with more assurance than ever that the Matrimonial Ambassador was a mere charlatan, and that he had never really married any one at all. The others now concurred in these views, and as the doctor still expressed his desire to find a wife, they suggested that he had better apply elsewhere.

VI.

THREE or four days had elapsed since Pascal had, to his idea, seen M. de Saint-Roch for the last time in his life. He had given up thinking of the Ambassador almost altogether, when one evening, on his return home, his servant handed him a letter which had arrived during his absence in the day time.

Pascal opened the envelope and read as follows :—

"MONSIEUR AND DEAR CLIENT.—I am at this moment informed of a an admirable opportunity which presents itself for you to make the acquaintance of Mademoiselle Antoinette Gerbeau. My excellent friend, the Chevalier de Jeuflas will call to fetch you this evening at nine o'clock pecisely, and will have much pleasure in conducting you to a ball where you will be able to meet the young lady in question.

"I should be extremely sorry if this letter failed to reach you in time, for we might not find such a favourable occasion for some weeks to come, the more especially as Mademoiselle Gerbeau seldom goes into society.

"I trust, monsieur and dear client, that you will consider me as your most devoted friend,

"J. D. DE SAINT-ROCH."

"The d—l," exclaimed Pascal ; "at nine precisely ! And it is already more than half-past eight. I must make haste to leave the house if I wish to avoid the person, the Ambassador sends me."

Scarcely had he spoken, than the servant opened the door and announced :—

"Monsieur le Chevalier de Jeuflas !"

The Chevalier was a well-bred, distinguished-looking man, polite, amiable, and extremely well dressed. It would be difficult to state his age, but he must have been somewhere between thirty and thirty-five years old. I have said that he was well dressed, indeed a mere glance at him sufficed to show that he patronised one of the very best tailors in Paris. His putty-coloured overcoat was just the correct thing, and his dress coat fitted him to perfection. In his button-hole he wore the variegated rosettes of two or three foreign orders, which invested him as it were with a kind of official dignity.

He did not seem in the least degree embarrassed at finding himself in a stranger's abode, but bowed to Pascal with a mingled air of aristocratic grace and freedom.

"Monsieur," said he, "a good friend of mine, who holds you in high esteem, has acquainted me with your desire to go into society. I should

consider myself very honoured in having the privilege of introducing a man like yourself to the few families I am acquainted with."

Position, gesture, tone—all were perfect, as Pascal remarked, whilst preparing his apologies. He explained that he had only reached home a few minutes previously, and had not till then been warned of the chevalier's visit. In point of fact he scarcely thought it advisable to accompany M. de Saint-Roch's friend.

"I am not dressed, monsieur," he added; "and I would not trespass on your time."

"Oh, never mind that," replied M. de Jeufas. "There is no hurry, and I can very well wait for you."

For a moment longer Pascal hesitated, but curiosity finally won the day, and after a fresh exchange of remarks he decided to accompany the chevalier.

"Well, if you will kindly wait for me," he said, "I will make haste and dress. May I offer you a Partagas to beguile the time."

"No thank you," replied M. de Jeufas, "I have a weakness for a good cigar, I will admit, but I never smoke when I am going into the society of ladies."

Whilst Pascal was dressing he asked himself, "How on earth can M. de Saint-Roch procure such assistants? That chevalier is simply perfect. Now-a-days only real noblemen and fashionable hairdressers refrain from smoking through fear of the smell troubling the ladies; and this fellow Jeufas is evidently a nobleman and not a hairdresser. Well, well, the adventure is becoming more and more complicated."

The chevalier had a vehicle waiting for him down-stairs, and as soon as he and Pascal were installed inside, he exclaimed, "This evening we are going to a dance given by a friend of mine who formerly occupied a high judicial appointment, but who has now-a-days retired from office. He gives two or three little balls in the course of the winter. He is an excellent worthy man, and his wife is a charming woman. I am sure that you will pass a pleasant evening in the society of the persons they receive."

On arriving at their destination the chevalier introduced Pascal as one of his oldest and best friends, and the young engineer plainly perceived by the graceful welcome of the mistress of the house that she held M. de Jeufas in high esteem and really had great regard for him. The house and the society fully corresponded with what the Ambassador's emissary had said; and Pascal felt great relief at finding that he had not been introduced, as he had originally feared would be the case, into an equivocal circle.

As soon as the introduction was over, M. de Jeufas drew the young engineer aside.

"Look over there," said he, in a wonderfully disinterested tone. "Do you see that pretty girl on the settee, near the window, the third from the curtain? Perfectly charming, isn't she? Her name is Antoinette Gerbeau. I greatly esteem her father, and her mother is, as every one admits, a perfect model of virtue. I am one of their intimate friends."

So saying the chevalier walked away, "leaving his young friend," as he put it, "to his reflections."

Pascal would have been hard to please, indeed, if he had not shared the chevalier's opinion concerning Mademoiselle Antoinette Gerbeau. She was certainly a very charming girl, her dark hair, most tastefully arranged, enhanced the alabaster whiteness of her skin, her ruddy mouth was curved into a dainty smile, and her large black eyes sparkled with girlish gaiety. At this moment a large number of guests were dancing a waltz, and no doubt she regretted that she was not among them. From time to time she turned towards her mother, seated in the rear, as if to reproach her for being the cause of this privation.

"M. de Saint-Roch did not deceive me," muttered Pascal; "she is really very lovely, indeed."

In presence of this charming girl he only thought of the Matrimonial Ambassador with repugnance; he would have liked to obliterate all recollection of the mysterious house in the Chaussée d'Antin from his mind, and to have owed this meeting to chance alone. "At all events," said he, "I must endeavour to dance with her." And making a circuitous *détour* round the room so as to avoid troubling the waltzers, he approached the spot where Mademoiselle Gerbeau was seated.

She was engaged for all the quadrilles except the next one; for fancying that she must have already promised it, the young *beaux* who thronged the ball-room had invariably asked her to inscribe their names for subsequent dances. Now the contingency of "sitting out" this next quadrille, like the waltz which had just been danced, by no means delighted her, so that when Pascal presented himself he was most graciously received—not because he was a good-looking, witty young man, but simply because he was a "partner."

Pascal was not fond of dancing as a rule. To his mind the modern quadrille was an extremely ridiculous performance, and yet he found the one which he danced with Mademoiselle Gerbeau a great deal too short, despite its elongated figures. No doubt he would have been greatly embarrassed to have given the reason why, for his conversation with the young lady had not been of any especial interest. Between the figures he had indulged in a few of those commonplace remarks about the heat, the time, the light and the music, which are current in Parisian ball-rooms, and on her side Mademoiselle Gerbeau had timidly given utterance to a few monosyllabic replies. That had been everything; and yet, when there came an end to the music—adapted from some popular opera by Beaumann, or one of the other fashionable "composers" of the day—Pascal could hardly restrain himself from calling out "Encore!"

He had to take his partner back to her place, and whilst doing so in circuitous fashion, so as to have the pleasure of feeling her leaning on his arm a little longer, he begged her to grant him a mazurka as she had promised all the other quadrilles.

"I don't dance the mazurka, monsieur," she replied with a little sigh and a half suppressed pout of vexation.

"Oh, mademoiselle," insisted Pascal, "allow me to solicit this favour in presence of madame your mamma. I feel sure she will not refuse me."

Mademoiselle Gerbeau raised her eyes to Pascal's and blushed to find that he had fathomed her secret inclination. She would have so much liked to dance that charming mazurka! But then she knew that her

mother was inflexible on certain dancing questions. So it was in a low voice, and without any great hope in the success of an application which others had no doubt often made in vain, that she answered, "You may do so, monsieur."

He proved an eloquent spokesman, this intriguing friend of mine, Pascal Divorne, and he was so wonderfully fortunate as to obtain Madame Gerbeau's consent. It was by no means an easy task, for the worthy lady prided herself on her rigid principles, which were well-nigh as immutable as the laws of the Medes and Persians. Every one knew that she had repeatedly vowed that her daughter should never, never take part in any of those improper dances, in which a young man is privileged to pass his arm around his partner's waist.

Yes, she had sworn and cried it on the housetops. It was, so to say, the first clause of the charter which she had graciously granted the first time she took her daughter into society. Quadrilles, which are virtually walked and not danced in the modern drawing-room, were permissible enough, but Antoinette must keep aloof from polka, mazurka, and waltz alike. As every one was fully acquainted with Madame Gerbeau's views on this important subject, no little astonishment was expressed when her daughter was seen pacing a mazurka in the company of a good-looking young man whom nobody was acquainted with. Rival mammas put their heads together and knowingly opined that there must be some little intrigue afoot, and that this fortunate dancer was destined to become a happy bridegroom.

As for Pascal, he was simply heroic; for with exemplary courage and self-sacrifice he danced three or four quadrilles with other young ladies, in hopes of subsequently obtaining another mazurka with the charming Antoinette. But when, at about two o'clock in the morning, he looked round the room in search of Madame Gerbeau, so as to wring from her a second consent, he found that both she and her daughter had disappeared.

His disappointment was most acute, and he regretted having indulged in all this saltatory exercise for nothing. What should he do? He was asking himself this question for the twentieth time when he suddenly remembered the Chevalier de Jeuflas, whom he had quite forgotten during the last few hours. He had some little difficulty in finding M. de Saint-Roch's emissary; but at last he discovered him in one of the card-rooms. The chevalier was playing at *écarté*, and the little pile of gold in front of him showed that luck was on his side. He no longer looked the same man, for his previous frigidity had vanished, and his features wore an expression of concentrated delight. His eyes sparkled, and it was clear enough that he was allowing his favourite passion full rein.

"So that's the secret," thought Pascal. "The chevalier is a gambler! And to satisfy his passion he has sold himself to Saint-Roch. Poor devil! What slavery!"

As soon as M. de Jeuflas caught sight of his *protégé*, he made him a friendly sign as if to say, "Pray wait for me." After that he was no longer absorbed in his game. The gleam left his eyes, and his features recovered their customary expression of composure. If he continued playing, it was merely because he was bound to finish the game he was engaged in.

As soon as it was over, he left the *écarté* table and joined Pascal. "Well?" he asked with a certain amount of anxiety which could be easily detected in his glance.

"I am delighted," answered the young engineer; "positively delighted. I don't think I have ever met such a charming girl before."

"No doubt, no doubt," responded the Chevalier de Jeufilas, whose satisfaction was now as apparent as his anxiety had been a moment before. "I felt sure she would please you. Would you like me to introduce you to her father, who, as I think I told you, is one of my good friends."

"By all means; but I fear he has left. At least Madame Gerbeau and Mademoiselle Antoinette seem to have gone home."

The chevalier looked at his watch. "Nearly three o'clock," he remarked. "As you say, it is too late. They always leave at two o'clock. Madame Gerbeau is a woman of inflexible principles, my dear sir—at all events except for you. Ah! you must have greatly prepossessed her in your favour."

"What, that mazurka?"

"Precisely. If you were acquainted with Madame Gerbeau like I am, you would know what a concession it was. But come, tell me are you at liberty to-morrow morning?"

"Why?"

"Because I might manage to let you lunch with M. Gerbeau."

"Oh! I am as free as a bird!" retorted Pascal with alacrity.

"Very well, then. To-morrow, or, rather, this morning, find yourself in the Passage Jouffroy, sauntering up and down. Be there about eleven o'clock, rather before than after. I will meet you as if by chance."

"All right, you may count upon me."

At three minutes past eleven, as Pascal was walking round the Passage Jouffroy for the second time, he espied the chevalier coming in his direction. M. de Jeufilas was giving his arm to an elderly gentleman with a good-natured look and a prosperous air—Mademoiselle Antoinette's father in person. The chevalier seemed delighted to meet his *protégé*, and informed him that he had called on his old friend Gerbeau that morning to tempt him out of doors for a little ramble; and finally, he invited Pascal to go and lunch with them.

Pascal accepted with evident delight, and on the way to the restaurant they were bound for, M. de Jeufilas found means, despite the trifling distance, to whisper certain particulars of the young engineer's biography into M. Gerbeau's ear, so that, on reaching their destination, the retired cotton-spinner knew that he was about to lunch with a very remarkable young man, whose conduct had always been exemplary, and whose ability was above all question—a young man who had indeed formerly been a student at the Ecole Polytechnique, who belonged to a wealthy and honourable family, and who was possessed of a private fortune of four hundred thousand francs, amassed by his own skill and exertions.

The chevalier related all this in an *aparté*, between two puffs at his cigar; for he was given to smoking in the morning. His skill was cer-

tainly not thrown away ; for M. Gerbeau was already delighted with Pascal, even before the dessert was served, and after the coffee he was fairly conquered.

Mademoiselle Antoinette's father had no doubt been very skilful in conducting his business at Roubaix ; but a man may be most expert in cotton-spinning, without knowing anything of houses or house-building. Now it so happened that, for the last eighteen months, M. Gerbeau had been engaged in a very worrying speculation. Having nothing to do with himself since he had retired from business, he had, like many an idle man of means, conceived the rash idea of indulging in house-building. He had sold an estate in Saintonge and had applied the proceeds to the purchase of ground in Paris, which he bought second hand and paid a very high price for. His eyes ought to have been opened at this juncture, but he obstinately persevered in his plan, and proceeded to erect one of those vast, seven-floored houses, familiar to every visitor to Paris, and each of which would amply accommodate all the inhabitants of a good-sized village. Now for a person who knows nothing whatever about building, the edification of such a huge caravanserai simply means ruination, long as his purse may be. Special knowledge is needed to control a contractor's estimates, and when this knowledge is wanting, the would-be landlord has to rely entirely upon his architect, who, if he be an unscrupulous man, can come to some nice little arrangement with the builders and totally sacrifice his client's interests. Now M. Gerbeau, being quite deficient in the requisite technical knowledge, was utterly unable to check the estimates brought him by his builders and his architect ; but as he was a man of common sense, he instinctively realised that one or the other of them was plundering him. Perhaps they were all in the same swim, but how was he to obtain full enlightenment ? He was beginning to feel real anxiety, for he vaguely knew that speculation was not unlike certain machinery : when a finger is once caught in the cords of certain apparatus, the immediate amputation of an arm becomes necessary, or else the whole body is bound to follow ; while in speculation, one bank-note calls for another, until an entire fortune is spirited away.

While they were lunching, M. Gerbeau related his misadventure to Pascal, and Pascal promised to extricate him from his difficulty, adding that a sacrifice would no doubt be necessary, but that he would endeavour to reduce it to the smallest possible figure. He kept his word ; and after a week spent in calculations, interviews, and running about, he was able to furnish Mademoiselle Antoinette's father with a plain statement of facts, and to name him, moreover, a fully solvent purchaser for the uncompleted house. Still, M. Gerbeau found that his little experiment would cost him fully sixty thousand francs, and he was horrified at realising the depth of the abyss which must have opened beneath his feet had he not obtained timely assistance. As it was, he saved the great bulk of the money he had invested in this unlucky enterprise, and his gratitude for Pascal's services, which had preserved him almost from ruin, was great indeed.

While Pascal was carrying on all these negotiations on M. Gerbeau's behalf he had frequent occasion to call on the latter at his house. He was invited to dinner several times, and thus had numerous opportunities

of seeing Mademoiselle Antoinette. In reference to that young lady his first impression by no means diminished, but steadily became intensified ; and, moreover, he found the Gerbeau family circle a most attractive one. The comfort, happiness, and honesty that reigned there reminded him of what his own home had been during his earlier days. Madame Gerbeau, so dignified and yet so affable, so affectionate, and yet so free from weak indulgence, recalled to him the memory of his mother. And above everything, he felt, he realised that he truly loved Antoinette.

Ah ! how he wished that the Matrimonial Ambassador would appropriately descend into the tomb with his secrets, engagements, acts, and registers kept in hieroglyphical characters ! He was haunted by the memory of unctuous and paternal-mannered Monsieur de Saint-Roch, that terrible man with the flaxen wig, whose face was as thickly and as brightly painted as Jezebel's. He did not dare to curse him, for, after all, it was thanks to his agency that he knew the girl he loved ; but how he longed to hear that the illustrious negotiator had shuffled off this mortal coil and betaken himself somewhere across the Stygian ferry ! He could scarcely wish him in Paradise, for what could the poor Ambassador do in that seraphic region where there shall be no marriage nor giving in marriage ? Then the young engineer remembered that signature of his which he had penned in his best handwriting at the bottom of his agreement with the Ambassador. He seemed to have it before his eyes—that horrible agreement, traced in letters of fire ; and he felt as if he had signed a pact with the fiend.

And that terrible Chevalier de Jeufias ! That other demon—another source of remorse. He was even more worrying than his patron, for the latter seldom left his laboratory, whereas the Chevalier was liable to be encountered at each step Pascal took. Was he not a friend of the Gerbeau family ? Would he not be present at the marriage, supposing it took place ? Ah ! no doubt those thin lips of his would curve into a satanic smile when he perceived Pascal and Antoinette at the altar. The young engineer would have given half he possessed to have become acquainted with Mademoiselle Gerbeau otherwise than by the agency of these two accomplices !

And to think that he had no one to confide in—not a friend he could consult. He would not have spoken to Lorilleux on the subject for worlds. What indeed would the doctor have said had he known what was transpiring ? Pascal trembled at the thought that his friends, his parents even, might one day learn that he had really found himself a wife by M. de Saint-Roch's agency.

However, it was necessary that he should take a decision, and so he confessed to M. Gerbeau that he loved his daughter. The retired cotton-spinner was delighted, but before giving a decisive answer he asked for a few days' delay so as to consult his wife and Antoinette. The answer proved favourable, and three days after asking for Mademoiselle Gerbeau's hand, Pascal was authorised to pay his court officially.

But to whom was he indebted for this prompt result which crowned his fondest hopes ?

Why, precisely to that "demon," the Chevalier de Jeufias, who, to avoid time being lost in inquiries, had answered for his young friend on his own head ; to the chevalier who, during an entire afternoon, had

remained closeted with Madame Gerbeau, singing his *protégé's* praises, recounting his life as it were day by day, and entering into all those minute particulars which mothers, anxious for their daughters' happiness, are so desirous of learning ; to the chevalier, who had spoken of Pascal's family as if he had known it for twenty years, tracing the most flattering, and yet life-like portrait of both Monsieur and Madame Divorne.

No doubt everything the chevalier said was true. And yet, what a trial and what a disgrace to owe one's happiness to such a man—to be his accomplice, so to say ; for in point of fact, M. de Jeufas lied, inasmuch as he stated things he was not personally sure of, and audaciously transformed whatever he considered probable into a positive fact. It chanced that the sum total of his communications was correct, so that his perspicacity and ability in reasoning were above all question, but the same can scarcely be said of his veracity. As for Pascal, he hardly knew whether he ought to feel enraged with the means employed or delighted beyond measure at their result.

VII.

A FORTNIGHT had elapsed, and Pascal, who of an evening had formerly been riveted as it were to his fireside, was no longer to be met at home. His friends called over and over again, and invariably "found" him "out." His servant had always the same stereotyped answer on his tongue : "Monsieur Divorne is not at home, and will not return till late at night."

Jean Lantier fruitlessly sought for his partner, whom he wished to see—so he declared—on important and pressing business, but Pascal was not to be met. As for Lorilleux, he was lost in conjectures and overwhelmed with anxiety.

This situation could not possibly last ; and one evening the doctor and the contractor met outside Pascal's door. At ten o'clock at night they were still waiting for him in his private room. Lantier, pressed by his wife, wished to speak to Pascal concerning one of his daughters ; while Lorilleux, on his side, had decided to invite his friend to a family dinner on the morrow, with the view of bringing him in contact with his sister.

At last, at eleven o'clock, Pascal made his appearance. His eyes were radiant with delight. He had passed the evening in the society of Mademoiselle Antoinette, who had replied affirmatively to a very pertinent question which he had made so bold as to ask her in an undertone. He returned home, with the fixed determination of writing at once to his parents, acquainting them with his intentions, and requesting their consent to his marriage. This, he thought, would be the best way to divert any such suspicion as might exist. Unctuous M. de Saint-Roch and the gambling Chevalier de Jeufas must remain behind the scenes. M. Gerbeau's building difficulties would alone suffice to explain how Pascal had become acquainted with his future wife. After all, it often happens that a business connection serves as the prelude to complete intimacy and sincere friendship.

"Well, so here you are at last !" exclaimed Lorilleux as soon as the

young engineer made his appearance. "Do you know we have been waiting for you for the last two hours. It is becoming almost an impossibility to see you now-a-days. But, 'pon my word, what a swell you are! Have you been dining with some sovereign prince? I didn't know you arrayed yourself so superbly!"

Love generally has a great influence on a young man's personal appearance; and, following the usual rule, Pascal had become quite a dandy since his introduction to Mademoiselle Gerbeau.

"Would you like me to be reduced to the traditional fig leaf?" he gaily answered. "When a man is bent on a conquest he must array himself in a conqueror's armour. So you are satisfied with my adornment?"

"Conquest—conqueror?" stammered Lorilleux.

"Certainly. You don't mean to say that you are going to complain because I've fallen in with the ideas which you yourself have preached from time immemorial. But now I think of it, have you found your ideal maiden during the last fortnight?"

The doctor had a presentiment that some terrible misfortune was about to befall him. "No," he replied; "not yet. It isn't so easy to find such a wife as I wish for."

"I should think not," chimed in Jean Lantier. "It's like plunging one's hand into a sack to pick out an eel from amidst a lot of vipers."

"You are all too exacting," rejoined Pascal. "I don't hunt after a chimera, and, upon my word, I've found what I wanted. I hope I've chosen the eel as Lantier says. To be brief, my dear fellows, as you are my best friends, you shall be the first to know the great news: I am going to marry. It's decided."

These words fairly overwhelmed the young engineer's companions. Lantier sank back helplessly in his arm-chair, while Lorilleux remained petrified as it were—as motionless as Lot's wife after her transformation into a pillar of salt, and as white as the professional cravat which encircled his neck."

Pascal looked from one to the other with absolute stupefaction. "Why, what's this?" said he; "the news of my marriage doesn't seem to delight you. I thought you would share my own satisfaction, and really expected your congratulations."

"So it isn't a joke?" asked Lantier.

"A joke indeed! Why I hope that the ceremony will take place before another three weeks are over our heads, and I expect that you will be present, my old friend Lantier. Besides, you will have to help me in building a nice little place where we'll have a jolly housewarming before next winter."

"I am at your service," answered the contractor with a sigh. "I had come to speak to you of a project of mine—of an idea that had occurred to me; but there is no hurry, and I will put it off to another time. It's getting very late now, and besides the occasion scarcely seems appropriate." Bowing to Lorilleux, who did not see him, he then shook Pascal by the hand and left the room. A moment later his heavy footfall could be heard as he descended the stairs which he had climbed two hours previously with all the joyful alacrity of hope.

As soon as Lantier was gone, Pascal went into another room, leaving

Lorilleux alone. The doctor then shook off the kind of paralysis which had struck him, to indulge in one of those fits of cold silent rage, customary only among men of his stamp. Bile, not blood, mounted to his brain, almost stifling and blinding him at the same time. With one word, Pascal had overturned the edifice raised by the labour of a lifetime, and the doctor was buried beneath its ruins.

All is lost!—There is no more hope! Such were the words that rung in his ears, and as he listened to them his rage increased. He would not have hesitated to commit a crime to satisfy his spite and wreak revenge. Only yesterday he had called Pascal his friend, and yet how bitterly he hated him now! In a few minutes Lorilleux's concentrated fury acquired extraordinary proportions.

"The scoundrel!" he muttered between his clenched teeth. "The scoundrel! So he betrays our friendship. Ah! he shall pay for the horrible sufferings he has made me endure. The happiness of his life will not suffice for my revenge."

And he walked up and down the room with a madman's feverish agitation, with haggard eyes and waving arms, which every now and then came in contact with the walls. He looked like some caged wild beast seized with a fit of frenzy. He would almost have murdered Pascal, but he was anxious to devise some more refined revenge.

At last this access of fury came to an end, and Lorilleux sat down again. His anger had not diminished; with a man of his stamp it would probably last for years, but at all events he had recovered his *sang froid*. The usual mask of frigidity again overspread his contracted features, and seated in front of Pascal's writing-table, he began to reflect. While resting his forehead on one hand, he allowed the other to toy with some papers spread over the open blotting pad before him. Suddenly, as his glance turned towards the table, he perceived a name at the bottom of a sheet of note paper—a name which at once explained the hitherto mysterious nature of Pascal's conduct. Drawing the paper from among the others with feverish alacrity, he muttered in a tone of well-nigh fiendish delight, "A letter from Monsieur de Saint-Roch! So that's the meaning of it, eh!" A moment later he had perused the note written by the Matrimonial Ambassador to announce the visit of the Chevalier de Jeufilas.

The date of this letter, which corresponded exactly with Pascal's disappearance from home, was equivalent to a full explanation. "There can be no doubt," thought Lorilleux, "Pascal's intended must be this Mademoiselle Gerbeau. I can easily control that point by-and-by. With a little skilful questioning, I can, no doubt, prevail on Pascal to give me his inamorata's name, and then we'll see! . . . What an idea! To think of his marrying one of Saint-Roch's hussies. Why its positively abominable." For a moment the doctor paused, absorbed in reflection. "But everything is not yet lost," he resumed. "I may after all be able to parry this unexpected blow." And yielding to a sudden inspiration, which illuminated his pale face with a gleam of joy, he chose a blank sheet of paper, took a pen, and prepared to write.

At this moment Pascal could be heard calling from the adjoining room. Having divested himself of his boots and his dress coat in his bed chamber, he had determined to allow himself the luxury of a cigar

by the fireside. "Well, doctor," he cried. "Aren't you coming to warm yourself? It must be bitterly cold in my work-room, and we shall be much better here for a quiet chat. Bring the box of cigars with you."

"All right!" replied Lorilleux. "I will be with you in a moment, but just let me finish a letter."

The doctor did not, however, write one letter, but two, the first of them running as follows:—

"DEAR MONSIEUR DIVORNE,—If you wish to prevent an irreparable misfortune, hasten to Paris at once. Your son Pascal is in the hands of an unscrupulous matrimonial agent, whom you very likely know by name—Monsieur de Saint-Roch. He is about to ally Pascal with one of those families which are shunned by all honest folks—he means him to marry one of those girls with lost characters who cannot find husbands. Pascal is blind, and, besides, he is infatuated with what he believes to be "love." He has concealed everything, even from his best friends; and of course even their remonstrances would be of no avail, for you know, yourself, how obstinate your son is. You alone can save him from shame and ultimate despair.

ONE OF YOUR FRIENDS.

"P.S.—It would perhaps be advisable not to show Pascal this letter. Come to Paris as speedily as you possibly can."

The second letter, intended for M. Gerbeau, was couched in the following terms:—

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—Accept my sincere congratulations. You are a good father, and I see that you are exempt from all foolish prejudices. You are going to marry your daughter to a man whom Saint-Roch, the matrimonial agent, introduced to you! What a splendid match it will be! You don't know what happiness is in store for Antoinette! You must be proud indeed to marry her to a man who owes his wealth to all kinds of disgraceful speculations—if, indeed, he be wealthy, which is perhaps not quite sure. You will be better pleased than ever when you learn why M. Pascal Divorne was expelled from the *Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées*. Apply to him, and he'll tell you how and why it happened. Come, old boy, get the dowry ready. Pascal likes the jingle of gold.

"Perhaps you are not inclined to believe me; but just look at the letter from Saint-Roch, which I enclose. That is unimpeachable documentary evidence, and what more could you wish for?

"Your best friend congratulates you. By-the-bye, have you fixed the day?"

In this second anonymous missive, Lorilleux carefully enclosed Saint-Roch's note referring to the Chevalier de Jeuflas's visit, and then, placing both of the letters in envelopes, he addressed the former one to M. Divorne at Lannion, and hurried into the next room with the box of cigars, as Pascal had requested. He must find out from the young engineer where he ought to direct the missive intended for M. Gerbeau, and trusted that their conversation would lead to that result. The doctor was now fairly elated, for he opined that his little scheme of treachery was bound to prove successful. A man who sees a tile—blown from the roof of a house, and threatening to fall on his head—shattered on the pavement beside him, without doing him the least harm, could

scarcely entertain a higher sense of deliverance from danger than Pascal's true and trusted friend.

"Well," said he, "now that we are alone, will you at least condescend to recount your romance? I think you owe me *that*, you dreadfully distrustful fellow! It will be some time before I forgive you for your want of confidence."

Pascal asked no better than to relate the story of his amours. He was glad to be able to talk about Antoinette to some one at last. And so he availed himself of what he considered to be a golden opportunity, and was as prolix as lovers usually are. However, he was particularly careful to make no mention of Saint-Roch—the Matrimonial Ambassador, or of the chevalier—his accomplice. He said that "a person of his acquaintance" had introduced him to the retired cotton-spinner, who happened to be in want of an architect. He had been happy enough to save him from a perfect disaster, and their intimacy dated from that time. He had seen and admired his client's daughter, had asked for her hand in marriage, and it had been granted to him. That was everything.

"But you have forgotten to tell me this worthy cotton-spinner's name," artfully remarked the perfidious practitioner.

"Oh! his name is Gerbeau. He was formerly in business at Roubaix," answered Pascal.

"So I was not mistaken," thought Lorilleux; and he added aloud, "and where does he live, the fortunate father of the future Madame Pascal?"

"At No. 5 in the Rue Pavée," replied the young engineer, in all simplicity.

"What! in the Marais!" ejaculated Lorilleux. "I should have thought that quarter of Paris rather below your attention, my dear fellow."

"Why, don't you know that after the Faubourg St. Germain, the Marais is the district where heiresses are most readily found. There's no mistake about it. And the Marais, moreover, is one of the rare quarters of Paris, where you can still find houses that people can live in, with rooms of decent height and surface, and staircases which two people can climb at the same time."

"Come, come, I see you're a happy mortal," remarked Lorilleux. "But, dear me, what a blunderer I am! I forgot to say something in the note I scribbled a moment ago."

And, returning into Pascal's work-room, he penned, in a disguised hand-writing, the following superscription on the envelope, which had hitherto remained blank:—

*A Monsieur,
Monsieur GERBEAU, ancien négociant,
5, Rue Pavée, au Marais,
PARIS.*

"Good-bye," said he to Pascal, when he joined the young engineer again. "I leave you in *tête-à-tête*, with your recollection of the beautiful Antoinette. I shall post my letter on the way home, and I shall try to dream that I have found an Antoinette for myself."

Lorilleux certainly had no remorse for the infamous treachery he was

perpetrating. Indeed, in his eyes Pascal's conduct would have justified still more perfidious conduct. However, the blow which had befallen the doctor was so recent that his features wore an unwonted expression. He was master of himself, undoubtedly, and yet his face, usually so pale, seemed livid. His unceasing efforts at self-control caused drops of perspiration to pearl down his temples, and his arm trembled as he advanced to shake his friend by the hand.

"There's something unusual about you to-night," said Pascal, looking at him fixedly. "Does anything worry you, or don't you feel well?"

"Oh, I'm all right," answered Lorilleux, with marvellous affectation of calmness. "I never felt myself in better health."

He then took a hurried leave, for he was anxious to be alone. Those two letters seemed to burn him.

On reaching the letter-box he paused and reflected. "If I post that note to M. Gerbeau to-night," he muttered to himself, "the cotton-spinner will certainly shut his door in Pascal's face—at all events, it's probable; but, on the other hand, it's probable that Pascal will have found some means of having an explanation, and then they might possibly become reconciled. On the other hand, if I allow M. Divorne time to arrive in Paris, the two fathers will have a set to, and, being equally enraged, they will so muddle the cards that this marriage will become altogether impossible. A couple of days must elapse before M. Divorne can receive this note, and then he will require a couple more to reach Paris, so I had better defer posting my missive to M. Gerbeau for another three or four days."

So saying, he slipped the note for Pascal's father into the box, assured himself that the letter for Antoinette's father was still in his pocket, and strolled home as happy as Titus was when he had not lost his day.

VIII.

It was eight o'clock in the morning, and Pascal, on foot since daybreak, was pacing his apartment with a measure in his hand.

"It is impossible!" he exclaimed, as he took the length and breadth of one of the rooms. "We can't live here. It's altogether too small. Even if I set up the partitions which formerly divided my apartment into seven rooms, I certainly couldn't increase its size by a single inch, whatever my landlord may think to the contrary. I must try and find something else. What a pity! For I shall certainly regret my view on the square, although, by way of compensation, my eyes will of course be spared the sight of that hideous Théâtre Lyrique, with its roof which looks like the top of a travelling trunk!"

At this moment his soliloquy was interrupted by a most extraordinary occurrence. There came a ring at the bell, which of itself was by no means remarkable, but when the front door was opened, who of all persons in the world should present themselves to Pascal's astonished gaze, but his father—M. Divorne, senior, just arrived from Lannion.

"What, *you*, father?" ejaculated the young engineer, who, in his surprise, let his measure fall to the ground.

"Yes, myself in person," answered the solicitor. "But before any-

thing else, one word—only one. Is it true? Are you really going to marry?"

"Of course it is. Why, I wrote it to you."

"And by the agency of one of those fellows who deal in dowries?"

Pascal looked at his father in amazement. He had carefully abstained from mentioning M. de Saint-Roch's name in his letter to Lannion; so that his astonishment and annoyance were great at finding his father so well informed. However, he did not for a moment think of denying the truth, for he considered that he might fearlessly confide in his father. "It's true," he answered.

"You unfortunate fellow!"

"But wait and let me tell you how the thing came about. It began as a joke, I admit, but the epilogue is serious enough, and I shall be indebted to it for my happiness."

Pascal's narrative was of some length, for he did not omit to mention the most insignificant incidents; but M. Divorne listened with all due patience—such indeed as he was accustomed to exercise when a client came to intrust him with a somewhat complicated suit at law.

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed the solicitor, when his son had at last concluded. "And you didn't see the trap—you didn't realise that you were being duped by an artful comedy?"

"But, father, it seems to me that chance alone . . ."

"Chance, indeed! What, you believe in chance! I always thought you to be more matter-of-fact. Can't you realise that those folks are endowed with some little cunning? Why, if they were not artful who could they hope to ensnare? I will admit that this little affair was schemed out rather ingeniously, and a cleverer fellow than yourself might have been caught in the trap. But an old solicitor like myself can't be so easily deceived, and fortunately I'm here."

The solicitor's words had sufficed to awaken suspicion in Pascal's mind. Hitherto he had not thought of doubting or suspecting, whereas now, he felt himself a prey to vague misgivings. Still he tried to defend the Gerbeau family.

"Come, come," said his father, interrupting him. "Just tell me what you know about these people. Whom have you questioned? Who has answered for them? Why, all your information has been derived from a couple of charlatans who were anxious to entrap you, from a pair of rogues who were bent on finding a husband for the daughter of a family of questionable repute, no doubt, and certainly ruined."

"Oh! ruined!"

"But you yourself wrote and said that if it hadn't been for your assistance M. Gerbeau would probably have gone to the dogs. You said he was engaged in some disastrous speculation, and how can you tell that he hasn't other affairs of the same kind?"

"Oh! if it were only a question of money I'm rich enough for both of us."

"Well, I'll admit that he's rich, very rich if you like, but does that prove he's an honest man? Why, I myself know many a millionaire who's a scoundrel. Merely by examining the manner in which these folks have behaved in this affair, I can almost prophesy that you will have to give up all idea of this marriage."

Pascal made no answer. Whilst he listened to his father it seemed as if scales were falling from his eyes. Had he not acted imprudently, with undue precipitation? Ought he not rather have made searching inquiries concerning the Gerbeau family, its antecedents, honourableness, and position?

"Listen to me, my dear fellow," resumed the solicitor; "let us reason a bit. When an honourable man wishes to find a husband for his daughter, what does he generally do! Does he apply to a matrimonial agent, to a monsieur—what's his name?"

"Saint-Roch."

"Saint-Roch let it be. Come, suppose you had a daughter, should you act like that! No, certainly not. Well then, that ought to open your eyes. And besides, how were you introduced into this family? Didn't Gerbeau and his wife receive you at once, without inquiries or references, contenting themselves with the 'word' of an accomplice? You entered their house like a beggar enters a church, and you were at once allowed to pay your court to the daughter! Why, 'pon my word those folks."

"But father, they go into decent society. I first saw the mother and the daughter at an entertainment given by a judge who had retired from the bench,"

"What, do you still believe in that retired judge? A judge who counts that chevalier of yours among his friends! Poor fellow! Why, you danced at some ball got up for the occasion, and attended by folks who were paid so much for their trouble."

"Oh! father, I'm not a bad judge of faces, and I can assure you—"

"Pooh! bosh! Don't you know that scamps with honest faces can be hired easily enough for occasions like that, providing you pay them their price. But, come, if you like I'll suppose that you are right on all these points. We'll say that the Gerbeau family is rich and honourable—extremely honourable. Let it be so. However, then it must be the daughter who—"

"O father!" cried Pascal vehemently—these words had indeed pierced his heart—"O father, don't talk like that. You don't know how pure and beautiful she is. If you only knew her you would at once admit your mistake and the injustice of what you say. You must see her. You cannot but admire her innocent expression and candid eyes."

M. Divoré shrugged his shoulders. "Eh!" said he. "Why, I'm surprised to hear you talking like that. You must be thirty years old or more, and when I was only eighteen I already knew what little reliance a man could put in "an innocent expression and candid eyes!" So you still fancy that a pair of beautiful eyes are the mirror of a girl's mind. Dear me, I had no idea you were a prey to such illusions. Don't you know that a woman can make her eyes say whatever she chooses . . ."

"But I love her," exclaimed Pascal with increased vehemence; "I love her."

"What, is it so bad as that?" rejoined M. Divoré. "Ah, my poor fellow! I'm afraid that there is no hope. However, before taking a decision, we must make inquiries and obtain information, and I will undertake to do all that before the day is over. But, first of all, give me something to eat, for I'm fairly dying of hunger."

During breakfast the solicitor endeavoured to console his son. Come," said he, "don't be so disconsolate, Pascal. We'll find you another wife. Your mother had one all ready for you, and she was greatly distressed on reading in your letter that you meant to marry in Paris. If you had only consulted her, all this wouldn't have happened. You would have come to Lannion and have seen the young girl she had chosen for you. I'm sure you would have fallen in love with her. However, everything is not lost. If this marriage falls through, you shall come home with me and we'll introduce you to your mother's protégé."

"Oh, I could never love any one but Antoinette," sighed Pascal sadly.

"Really?" exclaimed the solicitor shaking his head. "So it is so very serious. Dear me! Well, at all events you sha'n't long remain in uncertainty. Before to-night I will have discovered the truth. Please have a cab fetched, and just give me the addresses of those two matrimonial agents, as well as M. Gerbeau's. By the way, are you acquainted with any one who knows the family—a friend or an enemy of theirs—it's all the same."

"No, I can't say I am. I don't know any of their set."

"Wonderful! Really you *are* an extraordinary fellow! And yet it would be very desirable to have a little conversation with some one who knows them. Think a bit, perhaps you remember somebody."

"Oh it's of no use thinking. I really know no one, excepting their notary—"

"Their notary! What, you know the notary who attends to the interests of the Gerbeau family, and you didn't say so before? And you haven't ever thought of applying to him? But, my dear fellow, when it's a question of matrimony, a notary is the right source of information, the only proper person to consult. Notaries were expressly instituted for that purpose. Come, tell me his name, quick!"

"His name is Bertaud."

"Bertaud—Bertaud— No, I don't know him; but never mind. His position suffices. He's either a friend of mine or else he ought to be one; all legal officials are my friends. We are colleagues or something like it. Well, I shall commence my round by calling upon him; so now good-bye, and don't worry yourself while I'm away."

If M. Divorne had imagined that the information he was going in quest of would prove passable, much less satisfactory, he would certainly never have undertaken this investigation. In preference, he would simply have told Pascal that he quite disapproved of the match, and have profited of his son's surprise to wring from him the promise that he would not act contrary to paternal advice. But he was in expectation of learning some scandalous particulars concerning this M. Gerbeau, who offered his daughter for sale through the medium of a matrimonial agent. He anticipated being favoured with some strange confidential revelations, and the idea so pleased him that he positively chuckled as he got into his cab. He was indeed delighted; for on leaving Lannion he had promised his wife that he would prevent this absurd marriage from taking place, and now it would be broken off, thanks to the mere weight of evidence, and without his having to exercise the least degree of paternal authority. Pascal would have no cause to complain of his

action, but, on the contrary, must feel grateful for his services. Had he not evinced all due sympathy for his son, had he not seemingly entered into his ideas, postponing all decision on the subject until after this inquiry, which was bound to show that such a marriage was a sheer impossibility. So soliloquised the solicitor when, after alighting from his vehicle, he climbed the stairs leading to M. Bertaud's office.

Pascal sat by his fireside overwhelmed with despair. Had he really been duped, as his father opined? Appearances were certainly in the solicitor's favour, and it was, after all, but small consolation to reflect that appearances are at times deceitful. How did it happen that Mademoiselle Gerbeau's name had been included in the list of heiresses figuring on Saint-Roch's hieroglyphical registers? Plainly enough there was some mysterious reason, but what could it be? Ah, he had made a grand mistake in carrying matters so far, without making the least inquiry! He had blindly trusted Saint-Roch and that arrant knave the Chevalier de Jeufias. Such conduct was truly worthy of a simpleton. Thus experience and reason both told him that his father was in the right; and yet, on the other hand, he was in love, and so, whilst his mind espoused the solicitor's views, his heart warmly pleaded in favour of Antoinette.

In the midst of his reflections, he was suddenly startled by the noise of a dispute in the ante-room, and a moment afterwards the door opened, and the Chevalier de Jeufias, in defiance of the orders which had been given to the servant to admit no one, literally bounded into Pascal's presence. Our hero's first impulse was to spring at the chevalier's throat and strangle him, but fortunately he restrained himself, and indeed his anger died away when he beheld the plight of M. de Saint-Roch's friend and agent.

Poor Chevalier! He looked ten years older than usual. In a single night care had impressed deep wrinkles on his brow. He, who had held himself so upright the day before, was now as bent as if he carried a weighty burden on his back. He was no longer irreproachably dressed. His neck-tie was sadly creased and tumbled, and his boots were dirty with mud. As a rule, the few hairs remaining to him were most symmetrically arranged, but now, alas! they straggled here and there, or stood on end like the remaining feathers of a fowl almost completely plucked.

He must have received a terrible blow, for he looked almost as afflicted as Pascal. There was a mournful gleam in his eyes, and his voice quivered with profound sorrow as he piteously exclaimed, "Ah! It's all lost. . . But you know of the misfortune. I can see it by your sadness." And, as if overcome with grief, he thereupon sank into the arm-chair nearest to him.

"Yes," answered Pascal. "My father's arrival. . ."

"Your father, indeed! Oh, he's not in question. But haven't you received M. Gerbeau's letter?"

"Several letters have come for me," answered Pascal, "but I had not thought of opening them. They are lying there, on the mantel-shelf."

Making a great effort the chevalier rose to his feet, approached the chimney-piece, and taking up Pascal's correspondence searched for a

moment among the letters, newspapers, and prospectuses which had arrived by the morning's post.

"Ah! here's Gerbeau's letter," he exclaimed at last; "I recognise his hand-writing. You will allow me, eh?" And without waiting for an answer, he tore open the envelope and glanced at the missive it contained.

"Yes, it's all over," he remarked sadly, when he had finished his perusal: "I know Gerbeau by heart. He would rather die than confess his mistake. Come, read yourself"—and so saying, the chevalier handed the letter to Pascal. "You will see what he says. Above all, try and keep calm."

To all appearance this last advice was not superfluous, for M. Gerbeau had written under the influence of violent anger, and had certainly not measured his words. "You need not take the trouble," he wrote, "to present yourself, monsieur, at my house again. In future you will not be received. I know everything. I am acquainted with your perfidious devices to win my confidence. I know who are the odious accomplices who obtained you a footing in my house, and I am equally aware that you were expelled from the *Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées*. I bitterly regret being indebted to you in my business affairs. You may fix the price of your assistance, yourself. Ask for half of my fortune if you choose, but it would be useless for you to think of my daughter for another moment."

Pascal read this insulting epistle very slowly. It is true that he did not understand much of it, but its sense and tenour gave him little concern. He was most preoccupied in thinking of the motive which had induced M. Gerbeau to take this course.

"Is it a comedy?" he asked himself; "but if so, what is the reason of all this acting? Perhaps Gerbeau behaves in this fashion, because he is anxious to anticipate a rupture, to forestall the inquiry which my father has commenced. But then how can he have heard of my father's arrival in Paris?"

Pascal tortured his brain in vain. He could think of no satisfactory solution of the problem. At last, he quietly laid the letter on the table, and M. de Jeufilas, who was scrutinizing him, and expecting an outburst of rage every moment, could not restrain an exclamation of surprise, at what, despite his own advice, he considered, under the circumstances, to be most extraordinary calmness.

"Well!" asked the chevalier after a brief pause, "what do you say to that?"

"What can I say? M. Gerbeau has no doubt gone mad. He writes me an insulting letter, but Heaven only knows why!"

"What! don't you understand?"

"Excuse me. I see that he no longer consents to my marriage with his daughter; but that's all I see. It really wasn't worth his while to offer her to me through M. de Saint Roch's agency."

"But, my dear sir, if he withdraws his consent it is precisely because he has become acquainted with Saint Roch's interest in the affair."

"Come now, that's really *too* much to swallow!" rejoined Pascal. "Do you hope to make me believe that Mademoiselle Gerbeau's name was on your friend's registers without her father's knowledge! And

'with documentary evidence in her favour,' to use Saint Roch's own words!"

"I swear to you that he didn't know of it!"

"Then I understand nothing at all of the affair."

"And yet it's very simple! In Saint Roch's matrimonial negotiations it almost always happens that one of the parties is ignorant of his participation in the affair. Did you imagine that he knows all the people he marries? Far from it—but he has agents, co-operators, who work for him, obtain the information he requires, and—"

"And share the commission with him, eh? Come, that's capital! So, chevalier, you are one of the 'co-operators?' A very pretty term! Let me congratulate you!"

Pascal's sardonic glance called a flush to poor Jeuflas's cheeks, and for a moment he remained silent, quite out of countenance. Then suddenly gaining courage he exclaimed, "Well, yes. I am one of Saint Roch's agents. A man must live, and after all I know of worse professions. If there be any shame about it, I share that shame with many a man who is decorated, and with many and many devout old ladies who are highly esteemed and honoured! Ah, I am acquainted with a good many people whom you would never, for one moment, imagine to be Saint Roch's agents. But after all, what's the harm when a man acts loyally?"

"Oh! loyally!" interrupted Pascal.

"Yes loyally. I can easily explain to you the mechanism of Saint Roch's profession. He has a number of agents—myself, for instance. I draw up a list of all the marriageable young ladies with whose families I am acquainted. I obtain full and precise information concerning them and their parents, their morality, fortune, expectations, and so on. I do the same as regards all the eligible bachelors. I know and take all this information to Saint Roch. His other co-operators act in the same manner. He copies our lists into his registers, and can then offer husbands or wives as the case may be, and without the interested parties having any knowledge whatever of his agency. This is precisely what happened as regards Mademoiselle Gerbeau. Sometimes, indeed, marriages are concluded without either party applying to Saint Roch—so skilfully are matters managed. In that case everything is done by his agents whom he places in communication with each other."

Pascal still retained the same sad look; but to say the truth he was inwardly delighted. He would willingly have embraced the matrimonial co-operator, for he was confident in his veracity. The afflicted chevalier's tone and manners were quite above affectation. So thus hope dawned once more in our hero's mind. "After all," thought he, "Antoinette is perhaps not lost to me."

"Now," said he to the chevalier, "Do you know how M. Gerbeau was informed of all this?"

"I ought to have told you before. He received an anonymous letter yesterday."

"An anonymous letter!"

"Yes, indeed; and what makes matters worse, is that it must have come from a friend of yours."

"A friend of mine!" exclaimed Pascal indignantly. "I would have you know that my friends are above such infamous actions."

"Well, it must have come from some one whom you receive, for inside the anonymous missive Gerbeau found the note which Saint Roch wrote to you warning you of my first visit."

"That's impossible!" cried Pascal, springing towards his writing-table, where he began to search for the note in question. But it was in vain that he ferreted among his papers, turned out all his drawers and emptied every portfolio—Saint Roch's note was not to be found.

At last he returned to his seat, looking extremely discouraged and perplexed. "It's incredible!" he exclaimed. "An anonymous letter! But now I think of it, who can have warned my father?"

"Ah!" replied the chevalier. "You have some very perfidious enemy—"

"Oh, I'll unmask him. If I could only see that letter sent to M. Gerbeau—"

"Go and ask him for it if you like" said M. de Jeufilas in a mournful tone. "For my own part I lack the courage. He treated me most shamefully this morning. He almost kicked me out of doors."

"Eh, but how the deuce is it that a man like you accepts employment from a matrimonial agent?"

"How? Ah, monsieur, poverty—you forget poverty—I was rich once, and now I'm ruined? A man can't work at my age, and besides what could I do?"

"Poor chevalier! I really pity you."

"At all events don't scoff at me. This affair with Gerbeau puts the finishing touch to my misfortunes. Heaven knows what will happen if it is noised about. My honour, credit, and good repute will all be lost. Every door will be closed against me."

"Well, come what may," exclaimed Pascal, "I can promise you that for my part I will keep your connection with the affair a perfect secret."

"Eh, but Gerbeau—will Gerbeau remain silent? He ordered me out of his presence this morning—me, the Chevalier de Jeufilas! What a disgrace! By this time he has no doubt told the story to a score of persons."

"I may be mistaken" answered Pascal. "But I fancy that M. Gerbeau will rather keep the matter secret. Remember, he has to think of his daughter's interests and reputation. You are alarming yourself unnecessarily, my poor chevalier."

Despite all his efforts, however, the young engineer could not bring a smile to the unfortunate co-operator's lips. Dismal thoughts filled his mind and he was but the shadow of his former self. When he at last withdrew he pressed Pascal's hand most affectionately, and his last words were a piece of advice—

"You have some very dangerous enemy," he said. "Be upon your guard."

This recommendation was at least superfluous. Threatened in his love, Pascal was firmly resolved to make every effort to discover the scoundrel who had thus betrayed his friendship. Perhaps M. Gerbeau would not recall his decision, and then the young engineer must bid good-bye to all hopes of future happiness. But at all events, he was determined to have his revenge!

IX.

SEATED at his writing-table, in front of the famous green cardboard boxes which contain so many and such terrible secrets, with his registers inscribed in hieroglyphical characters spread before him, the illustrious Saint Roch, whose eyes gleamed with inspiration, was labouring for the happiness of humanity.

The Apostle of Matrimony was preparing an advertisement, one of these superb advertisements, which, printed in bold type on the fourth page of the well known Boulevardian organ, "*L'Ami de la Religion*," at times invest that periodical with an amusing feature. The Ambassador's task was replete with difficulties, as could be judged by the numerous wasted sheets of paper strewn before him, and by the innumerable corrections and erasures scattered through every line of writing. But it should be noted that these advertisements constitute the serious part of the illustrious negotiator's functions. Each line costs him a considerable sum, and dealers in publicity have cunning little instruments with which they measure space to a nicety, so that it is necessary to say as much as is feasible in the smallest possible number of words. This is precisely what the "propagator and initiator of marriage" was intent upon. Moreover, his advertisement, albeit destined to soften the heart of every "single" person who perused it, appealed on this occasion more particularly to fathers of families.

"Prudent parents," said this singular effusion, "I am the guardian of family honour. It was I, Saint Roch—no branch offices—who invented matrimony forty years ago. My Laboratory conducts to the Altar, my Protection and Good Will are almost equivalent to the Sacrament. Do your daughters embarrass you? Send them to me and I will provide for them advantageously. Write to me—legibly, especially as regards your names and addresses. I have numerous Sovereign Princes, all anxious to marry, and all of unimpeachable honourability. Fathers of families! You will bless me—me, Saint Roch—for——"

The Ambassador paused, for at this precise moment he heard an alarm sounding in one or another of his numerous drawing-rooms. He carefully counted six vibrations, and then rose to his feet. "Ah! ah!" said he, "There's a client in the pearl-grey saloon!"

With these words he slipped the unfinished advertisement into a drawer, and, opening a cupboard, drew therefrom a blue-bell coat similar to the one he was wearing, with this difference however, that the latter was almost thread-bare, whereas the garment removed from the cupboard was bran new. As soon as he had donned this immaculate vestment—a most important proceeding in view of matrimonial negotiations—he approached a mirror to judge of his appearance. He drew his Malines ruffles half over his hands, arranged the frill of his shirt front, disentangled his watch chains, which fell like glittering cataracts over his waistcoat, rubbed the precious stones of his rings to give them additional brilliancy, and finally, with a coquettish wave of the head, imparted a more graceful aspect to his curly flaxen wig. Then after giving himself a last charm-

ing smile in the looking-glass, he hastened to the pearl-grey saloon where "the client" was no doubt growing impatient.

He made his entry, and according to his noble and affable habit, proceeded to salute his new customer in the most graceful style—that is in three steps, according to the instructions of the best professors of deportment, with his heels on the same line, his toes at an angle of forty degrees, the upper part of his body bent forward, his right arm gracefully rounded and his hand at the height of his chest. He was performing this admirable obeisance for the second time and was even preparing for the third and final bow, when his client, whom he had as yet scarcely seen, abruptly sprung at his throat, regardless of damaging his shirt frill, and vociferated as loud as he could: "You rogue! You scoundrel!"

Poor M. de Saint Roch was terribly frightened. He bounded on one side and endeavoured to get the table between himself and this unparliamentary visitor. His rapid evolution proved successful, but, in executing it, his coat tails came in contact with a stand, and seven or eight ex-votos in china were overturned and shattered on the floor.

"Ah!" thought the Ambassador. "This must be some newly married man who isn't quite pleased with his bride. Such things do happen at times, but, dear me, how violent he seems. I ought never to have married some poor little girl to such a hot-headed individual!"

M. de Saint Roch was mistaken in his surmise. His "client" was no bridegroom, but M. Gerbeau in person. Lorilleux's anonymous letter was producing its effects, and the retired cotton-spinner was no longer the quiet and dignified individual with whom the reader is acquainted, but rather a tiger let loose. He had been enraged almost beyond conception on learning that his daughter's name figured on M. de Saint Roch's registers. He cared little whether it were traced in ordinary handwriting or in the negociator's vaunted hieroglyphical characters. The important point was that it was there, and he had determined to cane the ambassador for his impudent and unheard-of presumption. Such indeed was the purpose he had now in view.

However, having entrenched himself behind the table, the Inventor of Matrimony drew breath, and regained a little courage. "I warn you," said he to his adversary, "I warn you that if you resort to violence again I shall summon my servants. Now, if you wish to talk, we'll talk, but softly, mind. First of all, who are you, and what—"

"Who I am, you scoundrel!" roared the retired manufacturer. "Who I am indeed! Why, I am a father, whose daughter you have compromised, you infernal rogue. My name is Gerbeau, and you tried to palm off upon me a double-faced customer of yours—a fellow named Pascal Divorne who was disgracefully expelled from the Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées!"

"Keep quiet!" shouted M. de Saint Roch in reply. "Don't dare to insult a young man whose little finger is worth more than your whole person."

"Ah! you insult me, do you? you scoundrel!" rejoined M. Gerbeau. "Wait a bit! Wait a bit!" And he turned swiftly round the table in hopes of catching the Ambassador, but his designs were defeated, for M. de Saint Roch proved quite as agile as he was himself.

In the meantime, as the two old boys raced wildly round the room, they kept up a fantastic battle of words in angry, panting voices. "Who authorised you to meddle with my daughter's marriage?" asked M. Gerbeau.

"I am not accountable to you!"

"We'll see to that. I'll go to law for redress."

"What do I care! I have judgments in my favour which sanction my honourable profession."

At last, however, fairly tired and out of breath, the two adversaries paused; but not before poor M. de Saint Roch's dress was in a lamentable state of disorder. His three gold chains hung here and there over his breast. His frill was in shreds, one of his Malines ruffles was half torn away, and his poetical flaxen wig was quite askew.

And yet the illustrious negociator had by no means lost his brilliant gifts of speech. On the contrary he proved most eloquent in his efforts to curb and conquer enraged M. Gerbeau.

"You spoke of going to law, sir," he cried, "but would it not be my right to prosecute you for your unwarrantable conduct? You have insulted a noble profession, you have slandered my sacerdotal mission!"

"Scoundrel!" growled M. Gerbeau between his teeth, as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"Other people have tried to discredit me in the eyes both of my contemporaries and posterity; but I have obtained due reparation from them. Are you acquainted with the judgments in my favour?"

"I don't care a fig for them."

"Have you read the speeches made by my counsel?"

"They have no interest for me."

"Have you perused the report, drawn up by eminent jurisconsults, which I have had printed at my own expense?"

"All that has nothing to do with the question," testily replied M. Gerbeau, although, to say the truth, he was beginning to feel a trifle ashamed of the excesses to which anger had carried him. "You have been daring enough to mix up my daughter's name in your scandalous transactions, and that's a thing I won't tolerate. Before I leave this house, I mean to tear out of your register the page where my daughter's name is inscribed. I forbid you to occupy yourself about her, and I require your formal promise and unimpeachable guarantees to that effect."

"Be it so," rejoined the Ambassador. "Follow me into my private room, and we will have an explanation."

After commencing in this stormy fashion, the "explanation" was bound to be a long one, and indeed it threatened to prove interminable. In sober truth we must, however, admit that never in his life before had the illustrious negociator been so winning, so eloquent, and so pathetic. Oblivious of the disorder of his dress, the consciousness of which on any other occasion would certainly have utterly confused him and stopped his tongue, he piled reasons and reasons upon reasons; not in any effort to disculpate himself, be it remembered, but in a strenuous endeavour to convince his adversary.

For, in spite of all the difficulties of the situation, he still hoped to prevent the marriage from falling through. It was such an admirable

match ! Bridegroom and bride seemed to have been expressly intended for each other. He, Saint Roch, knew it better than any other living soul.

First of all he began by attacking M. Gerbeau's prejudices ; and indeed, in hopes of conquering them the illustrious renovator of matrimony did not hesitate to tear aside the veil, which shrouds his sacred profession in mystery for profane eyes. He explained his system, he described the complicated arrangements of his house, and disclosed all the ingenious machinery of his calling. He vaunted the high character of his mission, and insisted on the undoubted benefits which were conferred upon society by his agency. That "Matrimonial Profession" which he had founded, of which he was the sole real exponent and representative, was a blessing for the world at large. It was, he declared, an undisputable, apparent proof of the progress of civilisation. It had its place beside all the many wonderful achievements of modern science and research. It was one of the glorious conquests of our age of enterprise, just like steam-power, gas, ready-made clothes, omnibuses and the electric telegraph.

Thus did the Ambassador proceed, and warming up with his subject he positively waxed sublime with eloquence when he began to speak of Pascal, when he enumerated all the young engineer's good qualities and attainments. Young M. Divorne was so frank and honest, so clever and so handsome, so wealthy, and yet so economical ! Surely no father—not even the most difficult to please in all the world—could hope to find such a *rara avis* for his son-in-law. Carried away by his subject, and growing each moment more and more anxious to convince M. Gerbeau, the Ambassador positively forgot his usual habits of discretion. Rather than allow a slur to remain on Pascal's character, rather than have it believed that the young engineer had been expelled from the *Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées*, as a slanderous anonymous letter asserted, he frankly told Antoinette's father the truth—namely that a passing love affair, long since abandoned, had caused Pascal to resign.

But despite all M. de Saint Roch's eloquence, he was really preaching in the desert. M. Gerbeau remained as frigid as marble, and merely raised his voice every now and then to remind the negociator of the object of his visit. At last perceiving that the Ambassador's eloquence did not abate, he exclaimed : "Come, come, that will do. I don't believe a word of what you say to me ; or rather, to say the truth, I believe that you have some very strong interest, indeed, in wishing to marry M. Divorne to my daughter !"

"Eh ?" ejaculated M. de Saint Roch. "But surely notaries also have an interest in trying to find wives and husbands for their clients."

"No doubt. But they are functionaries instituted by law. A father knows that he can confide in them. Their probity and discretion—"

"Their discretion !" exclaimed the Ambassador, who fancied he now saw an opportunity to strike a decisive blow. "Their discretion ! Ah, monsieur, I see that you are not acquainted with mine ! And yet I have spent a hundred thousand francs in advertising it to the whole world ! A secret confided to me is as safe—safer even—than money confided to the Bank of France. My house is the Confessional box of humanity, the tomb of the secrets of the universe. Nothing will ever transpire of the confidential statements made to me ! Even my death would provoke

no revelation, for letters, registers, notes, information, every thing will follow me to the tomb. Ay, to the tomb! My profession will rest with me in my coffin. I have never had a pupil—never apprenticed any one to my calling. As for my registers, open them, decipher them if you can! Cast your eyes over these lists of heiresses—heiresses of every part of the world—every name, every note is indited in hieroglyphical characters, which no one but myself can understand—”

At this moment the sound of an alarum coming from some distant room abruptly interrupted the Ambassador. He listened, and counted five distinct vibrations. “A visitor in the sky-blue saloon!” he muttered. “And at this moment! How unfortunate!”

Almost at the same moment a footman rapped at the door, and setting it ajar beckoned to M. de Saint Roch.

“Excuse me for just one moment,” said the Ambassador to M. Gerbeau, and he hurriedly approached the servant.

“There is a gentleman in the sky-blue saloon,” said the latter in an undertone.

“I know it. I’m not deaf. I heard the alarum well enough!” testily rejoined M. de Saint Roch. “It was most improper for you to come and disturb me.”

“But the gentleman is most furious, sir. He wouldn’t wait, and threatened to break everything in the place, if you didn’t come at once.”

“The deuce! What kind of man is he?”

“Oh! a big fellow with gold spectacles—rather old, well dressed, and looking as if he came from the provinces. He gave me his card.”

M. de Saint Roch took hold of the bit of pasteboard, glanced at it, and gave vent to an exclamation of heartfelt joy.

The card bore this superscription.

PIERRE DIVORNE.

Solicitor.

Lannion.

“Pascal’s father!” ejaculated the matrimonial agent. “The solicitor! Heaven has sent him here!” And seized with one of those sublime inspirations which in the midst of battle guide a general to victory, he pushed the footman on one side and hurried down the passage leaving his visitor, M. Gerbeau, alone, and stupefied.

M. Divorne, senior, had just left the office of Bertaud, the notary, and the latter had given him such unexpected, such satisfactory information concerning Antoinette’s family, that he bitterly regretted having promised his wife to prevent this marriage from taking place. However, he had given his word, and must act accordingly; so that, in lieu of solid reasons, based on fact, he would have to exercise his paternal authority and peremptorily refuse his consent to the match. Angered beyond expression at being reduced to this course, which he had so

particularly wished to avoid, since it could but result in a breach with his son, he had hastened to the Ambassador's dwelling, determined at least to wreak his wrath on the prime mover of this intrigue.

As such was his state of mind, it is not surprising that he greeted M. de Saint Roch almost as aggressively as M. Gerbeau had done. But the Ambassador did not lose time in superfluous discourse. Taking the solicitor by the arm, and all but pushing him forward, he exclaimed: "In my private room, sir, in my private room."

Then, as soon as the "laboratory" was reached, he turned towards his first visitor and said, "I have the honour of introducing to you, M. Pierre Divorne, solicitor, attached to the court of Lannion, and M. Pascal's father."

Next, wheeling round on one heel with all his customary agility, he confronted the lawyer and resumed: "I present to you, M. Gerbeau, who was formerly in business at Roubaix, and who is Mademoiselle Antoinette's father."

Thus introduced, the respective parties could but bow to each other, but they did so coldly and stiffly enough, whilst M. de Saint Roch went and sat himself down at his writing-table with the air of a man who has no further interest in the proceedings.

A pause of some little duration ensued, for both the solicitor and the manufacturer seemed ill at ease; but at last they both began to speak at the same time, rattling on very fastly and excitedly, as if by this means they each hoped to reduce the other to silence and compel him to listen. M. Gerbeau, who had not gone in quest of information, and who still fancied that he had been duped, was naturally enough the more irritated of the two, speaking in a louder key and constantly, nay, almost incessantly, repeating the same phrase. "I won't listen, I won't listen, I positively decline to give my daughter to your son."

This pertinacious and insulting obstinacy at length drove M. Divorne to exasperation, but after one or two bursts of passion he grew somewhat calmer, and finally wound up with a proposal which should have been made in the first instance: "Let us go together to your notary's" he said, "and have an explanation there."

"Let it be so," replied M. Gerbeau, and the two fathers went off—not by the mysterious portal behind the pigeon-holes, but by the main door of the apartment, at the risk of meeting any other "client" who might be arriving, and without so much as bidding M. de Saint Roch "good-bye."

But this impoliteness failed to affect the negociator. "They are going to the notary's," he said to himself while he gleefully rubbed his hands together. "That's a good sign. Well, I have had trouble enough, certainly; but I fancy I can consider the matter as settled. That will mean ten thousand francs at least—and making due allowance for Jeufilas's commission, there will be a clear profit of seven thousand."

Then turning once more to his unfinished advertisement—in preparing which he had been so brutally interrupted, he proceeded to pen the concluding lines: "What especially distinguishes M. de Saint Roch is that he is never guided by interest. His object is to moralise Humanity, and his method in prosecuting that stupendous task, is the propagation

of Matrimony. His device is embodied in the two words: 'Mystery and Disinterestedness.'

So far as his visitors were concerned, the illustrious negociator prophesied correctly. Everything was arranged at the notary's office. M. Bertaud, indeed, was one of those legal functionaries who recollect the advice given by a most distinguished member of the profession to his successor: "Remember, young man, that a notary is a mediator." Thus he skilfully intervened in the discussion and appealed to the reason of M. Gerbeau who refused to give his daughter in marriage, and to the patience of M. Divorne, who now obstinately demanded that young lady's hand for Pascal. At last, thanks to M. Bertaud's unctuous diplomacy, an arrangement was arrived at. After five hours' discussion the marriage was agreed upon, stipulated, decided—the contract being almost signed.

Among other conditions, it was specified that M. Gerbeau should give his daughter three hundred thousand francs in hard cash. This was at least fifty thousand more than the retired manufacturer wished to give, but all his objections were silenced both by the notary and by M. Divorne. The latter in seeking to swell the amount of his daughter-in-law's dowry, fancied that he was acting solely in his son's interest. He was blissfully ignorant of the nice little contract with M. de Saint Roch. Finally, the date of the marriage was fixed, and the two rival fathers, now the best of friends, left M. Bertaud's office arm-in-arm.

M. Divorne, whose ideas were quite transformed, was now all eagerness to convey the happy tidings to Pascal, who, although considerably reassured by the chevalier's visit, was far from expecting such a swift solution. He started back with surprise when he saw his father arrive arm-in-arm with M. Gerbeau; but he soon recovered himself, and was then rapidly acquainted with what had taken place both at the Ambassador's and the notary's. It so happened, that after all he was the least surprised of them all.

"Who would ever have expected such a thing?" repeated M. Divorne, who was quite unable to explain to himself how it happened that he had so totally forgotten the solemn promises he had made to his wife.

"What I can't understand," said M. Gerbeau, "is how Pascal can ever have had the incredible idea of applying to that charlatan Saint Roch."

"Oh, as for that," answered Pascal, "I can swear to you that I only went to him for a joke. I never imagined for one moment anything would come of my visit."

"As if matrimony were a joking matter!" interrupted M. Divorne in a grave voice, "why, it's playing with fire."

"But no one would ever have fancied that the Ambassador had anything to do with the matter," remarked Pascal, "if a friend of mine had not kindly written to you on the subject. No doubt he wished to injure me, but it so happens that he has done me a very great service indeed. I should like to know whom I have to thank for this result."

"For that you must see the handwriting," replied M. Gerbeau. "Here is the letter which I received."

"And here is mine," added M. Divorne.

However, the handwriting of both epistles was so skilfully disguised that it furnished no clue to the truth. Pascal turned the two anonymous missives over and over in his hand, trying to think who could have had a motive to injure him in this fashion, when suddenly he perceived his own initials "P. D." stamped in the corner of either sheet of paper.

"Why, good Heavens," he exclaimed, "These letters were written here. This is my own writing-paper."

"But who could have written them?" asked M. Gerbeau and the solicitor in the same breath.

"Ah! that's more than I can tell," slowly replied Pascal; "I receive visits from so many friends."

But, at the same time the young engineer reflected to himself that Lantier and Lorilleux were the only two people who could possibly have abstracted the note by which Saint Roch announced M. de Jeufilas's first visit. And this note, be it remembered, had been enclosed in the letter to M. Gerbeau. Yes, the culprit was either Lantier or Lorilleux. There could be no doubt about it. At that same moment a flash of memory reminded Pascal how pale and embarrassed his friend the doctor had looked the last time they had seen each other. He remembered, moreover, that Lorilleux had remained for some time alone in his study, having a letter to write, according to what he had said himself. So Lorilleux then was the guilty one. Was it possible? Ay, not merely possible, but morally sure and certain.

The thought that he had been deceived, betrayed, by the companion of his early youth, by the man whom he had always fancied to be his best and sincerest friend, caused Pascal a bitter pang. A man may be betrayed by the woman he loves, and acute suffering will assuredly be his lot; but the treason, the deceit of a bosom friend is still harder to bear, for it is even less expected. And yet Pascal carefully abstained from revealing the name he had just guessed. Indignant as he was, he could not forget his old friendship for Lorilleux, and the idea of devoting his old college chum to shame and contempt for evermore, was singularly repugnant to him. And besides, his silence was not actuated purely by generosity; a personal motive added weight to the course he took: he was ashamed of having to admit that he had been blindly deceived by Lorilleux's spurious protestations of interest and good will. Accordingly, when after a long pause M. Gerbeau asked him: "Well, have you guessed? Are you on the scent?" he quietly replied, "No, I have no idea, not even a suspicion."

"But the matter ought to be cleared up," suggested his father. "If you remain in uncertainty you will become suspicious of all your friends, and that will be most unjust for the honest ones."

"Oh, I prefer not to think any more about it," rejoined Pascal resolutely, "What is the use of stirring up a quagmire?" And crumpling the letters in his hands he threw them into a corner, intending, however, to pick them up later on and employ them in confounding and crushing the traitor Lorilleux at their very next interview together.

"Let it be so," exclaimed M. Gerbeau. "Let's think no more about it. We'll banish the whole affair from our minds. Forgiveness all round, even for Saint Roch and his co-operator Jeufilas. For myself, I

must go home and console my daughter, whom I left weeping her eyes out, as I don't mind telling you now."

Pascal was not precisely sorry to learn that Mademoiselle Antoinette had been crying for his sake, and no doubt, with the view of thanking his future father-in-law for the admission, he embraced him with all his heart.

X.

LIKE the miner who prudently withdraws as soon as he has applied the match which is to ignite his train of powder, Lorilleux had carefully remained in the background pending the explosion of his "anonymous" bombshells. It was on the morrow of this eventful day when Pascal's marriage at first so seriously compromised was finally decided on, that he showed himself again for the first time. To conceal his apprehensions he had assumed with considerable success a jocular air and tone of voice.

"Well, what news?" he asked, as he ensconced himself in a cosy arm-chair in Pascal's sitting-room. "For myself, I'm overwhelmed with work. All my patients seem to have agreed to fall ill on the same day. By the way, what about your marriage, old fellow?"

"Oh! matters are much the same," answered Pascal. "My engagement with Mademoiselle Gerbeau holds good."

"Ah!" exclaimed the doctor growing pale: "And your father?"

"He arrived in Paris yesterday morning."

"Does he consent!"

"Who could prevent him from doing so?"

Lorilleux lost countenance, and asked himself if by some fatality he had not misdirected his anonymous letters; but in the meantime Pascal, who had calmly risen to his feet, produced the two missives, and handing them to the doctor quietly exclaimed: "Look here, my friend, here are two notes which almost made my marriage fall through. Take them and burn them carefully. Don't let anyone ever imagine that you are capable of such conduct."

In calling on his friend that morning Lorilleux was prepared for everything and anything excepting this. He tried to stammer out a few words of explanation, he endeavoured to deny his guilt, but strength failed him. He was suffocating with shame and emotion. At last rising to his feet, and hiding his face in his hands, he went towards the door staggering like a drunken man.

But Pascal called him back. "Listen Lorilleux," said he, "I can't forget twenty years' friendship like that. Let me tell you I forgive you."

"Ah!" cried the unfortunate doctor, with tears starting to his eyes. "That's noble and magnanimous on your part, for you don't know the motive that influenced me."

"I don't want to know it."

"But it would be generous on your part to hear me. Listen to me only for one moment. Your marriage is the severest blow that fate could deal me. It has dispelled the dream of my life."

"What, my marriage with Mademoiselle Gerbeau? Come, come, you have lost your mind, my poor Lorilleux."

"No, Pascal, no," rejoined the doctor, shaking his head sadly. "I wished to give you a wife of my own choice. The one I intended for you was—was—my sister. You alone seemed worthy of her. I thought I could have thus assured your happiness and her's. For the last fifteen years I have been longing for that marriage."

"But why didn't you speak about it before? I might have had three or four children by this time."

"I thought it best to wait—"

"My dear fellow, I have told you over and over again that the folks who always wait for the pear to ripen run the risk of never eating it."

"Condemn me, crush me," sighed the doctor, "I deserve it, but in Heaven's name don't scoff at me."

"Oh! I am speaking seriously, and in all sincerity of purpose," rejoined Pascal. "Behold the vanity of human projects. You wanted to marry me to your sister. My mother was schooling an heiress whom she intended for me; Lantier had a daughter who he thought would make me an excellent wife! . . . But what has come of all those fine plans? Haven't they vanished in smoke, haven't they fallen to pieces like houses of cards? I am going to be married, true and sure enough, but not to your sister, not to my mother's heiress, not even to Lantier's daughter. Chance has fixed my fate. Believe me, my friend, premeditated marriages don't come off."

Lorilleux was too grieved and crushed to answer.

"Now listen to me," resumed Pascal, changing his tone. "Will you do a sensible thing for once in your life? Mind, you must accept—on the spot, and so to say blindly—a proposal which I already thought of making to you before you came here. When you know what it is you will realise that I had forgiven you beforehand. Come, tell me, will you accept my proposal?"

"I am ready to do whatever may please you," answered the doctor with an air of subdued resignation.

"Then this is my offer. Lantier—as I just told you—wanted to give me one of his daughters—the eldest—with a dowry of two hundred thousand francs. She is a charming girl, as you know yourself, for you have often seen her, when we have dined together at Lantier's house. But Lantier, as dilatory as yourself, only spoke to me of his project this morning. It was too late, for my heart was already given away. But to calm his grief, and assuage his disappointment, I suggested another son-in-law to him. And that other son-in-law was yourself. Lantier would gladly ratify my suggestion. He has great respect for your attainments, and I believe that the young lady herself considers you a superior man. So come, tell me, will you propose for her hand? Is it decided?"

"At least grant me a few days for reflection," pleaded Lorilleux, who was overwhelmed with surprise.

"Not a day, not an hour. It must be 'yes' or 'no' on the spot."

The doctor's mind was whirling. It seemed incredible to him that he could be required to take so grave and so sudden a decision, and he instinctively closed his eyes, like the dazed traveller who unexpectedly comes upon a yawning abyss. It was a trial indeed to be called upon to decide the most important act of life at a moment's

notice, and especially for such a man as himself. Had he not been accustomed to prepare and mature his most insignificant deeds—had he not been in the habit of weighing all the *pros* and *cons* of even every-day actions, and now must he literally decide his fate without even examining the alternatives, without for a moment appealing to the vaunted rules of logic which he had been so accustomed to apply? It was not without a pang, not without a struggle, that he conquered the habits of his life-time, and said to Pascal, who was impatiently awaiting his answer—"Let it be so—I accept."

At the same time he remarked to himself, "My wife's fortune will shed lustre on my sister."

"So I can inform Lantier?" resumed Pascal.

"Yes," answered the doctor, "I have always been unlucky, but perhaps luck will come to me now, through you."

"Eh? my dear fellow, you must keep the door open if you want happiness to enter the house."

* * * * *

That same evening, taking time by the forelock, and with the view of preventing subsequent explanations and sorrow, Pascal, acting contrary to the advice of M. Gerbeau and M. Divorne, acquainted Mademoiselle Antoinette with everything that had occurred. He told her about his visits to M. de Saint Roch, and explained how it happened that he had been introduced to her family by the Chevalier de Jeuflas.

Antoinette's only answer was to give Pascal her hand, as I trust, friend reader, the woman you love, may give you her's when you have ought to ask of her.

However, the Chevalier de Jeuflas was not invited to the wedding, which took place a fortnight afterwards.

XI.

A MONTH had elapsed, and the young couple, in the flood tide of honeymoon bliss, were installed in a charming house of the Champs Elysées, (arranged with the greatest care by Jean Lantier, now Dr. Lorilleux's father-in-law), when one morning a visitor presented himself, and requested to speak with M. Pascal Divorne. Despite the early hour, this visitor was most coquettishly attired. Over a resplendant blue-bell coat, he wore a light coloured surtout lined with white satin, and his gloves were of the faintest shade of pearl grey. So as not to interfere with the marvellous arrangement of his flaxen hair he carried his broad brimmed silk hat in his hand.

Pascal's valet thought that this curly-headed stranger had just left some ball, and had made a mistake in the number of the house he was bound for, but the visitor insisted so pertinaciously and alluded so pressing to urgent business, that the servant at last ushered him into his master's private room.

"Good morning my dear child," said M. de Saint Roch (our readers will have recognised the illustrious ambassador) in a honeyed voice, "I wished to surprise you in the midst of your felicity. Will you excuse this indiscretion which is my only reward?"

Pascal did not think it needful to offer the negotiator a chair.

"Well my dear client," continued M. de Saint Roch, not in the least degree abashed by this frigid reception, "Well, do we bless our friend? You will have seen that I did not deceive you. Papa Gerbeau has behaved generously. A fine sum—three hundred thousand francs—"

"The fact is that I am rather busy this morning," interrupted Pascal. M. de Saint Roch heaved a sigh. "The ungrateful boy," he muttered, "The ungrateful boy! He forgets that it was I who initiated him to the felicity of matrimony."

"But what is the object of your visit?" asked Pascal.

"Oh! the least thing in the world," rejoined the ambassador. "We have a little agreement together, you will remember—a mere nothing—a *bagatelle*—five per cent on the amount of the dowry, and as you have received three hundred thousand francs, there are fifteen thousand due to me."

"And if I refused to pay?" suggested Pascal with a smile.

"Oh!" exclaimed M. de Saint Roch, growing pale under the layer of vermilion that adorned his cheeks, "Oh! what a cruel joke! The idea of haggling over your happiness!"

"But if I *didn't* joke, if I *did* haggle?" rejoined Pascal.

"Then to my grief we should have to plead—And you would gain nothing by it, for I should certainly win the suit. As you are aware I have judgments in my favour."

"Enough, enough!" interrupted Pascal. "Here take your money, my disinterested friend."

"Ah, dear child!" exclaimed the illustrious negotiator, in a soft voice. "I did not expect less from your gratitude. It becomes you to pay the debt of happiness." And noticing a little bronze paper weight on the writing table he slipped it into his pocket adding: "I must take this. It will be a precious souvenir—more precious indeed than the bank-notes which you have just given me. Am I not your second father? In gazing at this pious gift—"

"Come, good-bye, dear Monsieur de Saint Roch," interrupted Pascal, pushing his second father towards the door.

But Hymen's pontiff paused on the threshold:—"Dear lad," said he in an under tone, "If ever—God spare you such a misfortune!—but if ever you did happen to lose that dear wife of yours, don't forget my services. Remember all I have done for you—remember my device "Discretion and Disinterestedness"—and if you *did* think of marrying again, come to me in all confidence, and honour me with your custom."

LOVE OR WEALTH?

I.

A PARISIAN VISCOUNT.

IT was six o'clock in the morning, and, strange to relate, Viscount Maxime de Tressang was already a-foot. Stranger still, he was to all appearance immersed in reflection. Leaning against the window-sill of his bed-chamber, with a cigar between his lips, he gazed vacantly over the beautiful grounds of the family mansion, one of the most superb abodes of that aristocratic district, the Faubourg St. Germain. The viscount was barely five-and-twenty. He had the reputation of being both a witty and a handsome man, but his good looks had been considerably impaired by early excesses. Maxime de Tressang, or as his friends called him "Max," had indeed been one of the wildest *viveurs* of Paris. In three years he had squandered half a million of francs left him by his mother, who had died when he was but a child. But after three years' delirium he had woken up to find himself penniless. Creditors, hitherto kept at bay, now showed their teeth, and the viscount was threatened with imprisonment for debt. Their clamours had reached the ears of Max's father, the old Count de Tressang, who had informed his son that there was but one way to get out of the difficulty—to pay what he owed. The viscount objected that his purse was empty, and that was true, but as his father pointed out, his mother's fortune had consisted largely of farms and broad acres in the sunlight, of luxuriant vineyards and radiant pasture-lands, and these might, or rather must be sold, to procure the wherewith to discharge his debts. Sold they were—the shady valleys and the breezy slopes, the wavy woods and the rippling watercourses, and there was an end to Max's maternal fortune and his troubles.

A great many people blamed the old Count de Tressang for having refused to unloosen his purse strings, for the count had a large fortune of his own, and, had he chosen, might easily have spared his son the disgrace of having to bring his mother's estates to the hammer. But those who spoke in this fashion were not aware that the count had employed agents to buy up every rood and perch that was offered for sale. Max himself was ignorant of this circumstance, and little imagined that at his father's death he would find himself master once more of the maternal belongings, in addition to securing the paternal inheritance

In the meanwhile, his ruin was complete, but, to all appearance, he resigned himself with a good grace to his altered circumstances. He assumed the air of a man who, having drained the cup of pleasure to its dregs, has no longer any desire to see it replenished. He declared that he was utterly *blasé*, that the gay life of Paris had no longer any attractions for him, and he shrugged his shoulders when the companions of his former exploits spoke to him of what was occurring in their circle. He laughed when he heard that some luckless neophyte had just made a tremendous plunge, or that a new-comer had singed his wings in the devouring flame of Paris. And yet, to say the truth, in the solitude of his own chamber he often thought of his own scorched pinions.

Had he chosen he might still have cut a decent figure in society, for when he was obliged to return to the paternal roof, his father said to him, "Well, Max, you are ruined. I expected as much. Perhaps I might have prevented it, but I didn't choose to. It is the habit in our family for the young fellows to pay their debt to youth, so let us say no more on the subject. Your mother was not very wealthy, and what she left to you has vanished in no time. Fortunately, however, I am wealthier than she was. No doubt you are very repentant now, but you might perhaps take it into your head one day to throw my fortune out of window like you did your mother's. I can't presume to say what you will do when I am gone, but as long as I live I am determined to prevent that eventuality occurring. So this is what I have decided on. My house, my table, my servants, my horses and carriages are all at your disposal, and in addition I will allow you a thousand francs a month. Are you satisfied?"

"Yes," answered the viscount in despair. "Yes, I am satisfied." But at the same time he thought to himself, "The best thing that I can do is to blow out my brains."

A night's sleep calmed him, however, and he thought better of it. After all his father was old—and though he did not desire his death—Heaven forbid!—still the count could not last many years longer, and then he, Max, would be his own master once more.

When misfortune overtook our viscount, some folks tried to scoff at him, but they only did so at a distance, for he was apt to be susceptible, and besides, as was well known, he was expert both with sword and pistol. Moreover, he was passing popular in the world of *viveurs*, for, after all, he had "plunged" with considerable grace; so as soon as the first stir occasioned by his ruin was over, he was looked up to with some little respect. His whilom comrades remembered that "honour to the vanquished!" had been a favourite device among their ancestors—the knights of olden time. Still their respect for Max was dosed with commiseration, and commiseration was just what the viscount did not care for.

On the particular morning we have mentioned, as Max leant out of his window, smoking a fragrant panatellas, and inhaling together with the *vuelta de abajo* the balmy air of the beautiful grounds spread out before him, he was reflecting on a book which he had chanced to glance at the day before, and which he had very imperfectly understood. This book was Stendhal's work on *Love*. We have said that he only under-

stood it imperfectly, but to speak correctly it must be admitted that certain passages of it had impressed him, and aroused a curious strain of thought in his mind. Reverting to the title of the work itself, he asked himself in all good faith what was this sentiment—Love—which everyone talks about, which everyone comments upon, but which few indeed have really ever known. "It is a painful fact," mused our viscount, "but I am really tempted to think that the name alone exists. Now-a-days every man of five-and-twenty is more or less *blasé*, according to his station. He has come across innumerable women, fair and dark, witty or foolish, pretty or plain, brave in silk, or shabby in cotton. By the time he reaches thirty, celibacy has become either intolerable or impossible, especially if he happens to be three parts ruined, and so he feels the need of uniting his destiny to some marriageable young woman, the richest one he can find. A marriage is "arranged," as people say; it is either a *mariage de convenance* or a *mariage de raison*, if indeed it be not a pure speculation. After all the three expressions are really synonymous. Well, our man marries, and then he thinks he has a right to have his little say on women and love. Now I should like to know what experience he can have had of love in all this. He can scarcely have loved the women he knew before his marriage, the women who drained his purse and deceived him behind his back; and can he love the woman he deceives with a mock courtship, which is only sincere in as much as it applies to her dowry? The whole affair is so much immoral bartering. As for love it doesn't exist, except in name."

Max had reached this point of his reflections, and was thinking whether any objection could be found to his theory when he was suddenly startled by a shrill cry, which apparently came from the other end of the grounds. "What can the matter be?" thought the viscount, "Some one in distress? Suppose I go and see." And fancying that a little exercise would enable him to shake off his fit of spleen he left his room and went down-stairs.

II.

THE GARRET WINDOW.

At the further end of the grounds in the rear of the Count de Tressang's mansion stood numerous old houses, the windows of which had been walled up so that none of the tenants might intrude on their aristocratic neighbour's privacy. This had been done in virtue of an arrangement between the count and the landlord of the ancient tenements, the latter receiving a handsome sum which induced him to cheerfully deprive his tenants of air and light in addition to a superb view. Of course the tenants were not entirely left in the dark, for little windows had been pierced looking into a narrow, dismal, stench-abiding courtyard, where the sun rarely ever penetrated, and as the piercing of these new windows entailed some trifling expenditure the landlord thought himself justified in exacting an increased rental. If the tenants were not delighted after that, they must have been hard to please indeed. There was but one tenant in the old buildings who still retained a view on the Count

de Tressang's garden. This was the occupant of a little garret near the sky which was so situated that it must have remained entirely without light if its window looking on the grounds had been blocked up. The landlord of the old tenements had explained this matter to his noble neighbour, and as he could not possibly hope to let a room without even the semblance of a window, it was decided to let this single little case-ment remain.

Now it was from this window that came the cry which had startled Max and excited his curiosity. This curiosity of his was all the more keen, be it noted, as he had judged from the sound that it must be some woman, or rather some young girl, who was in distress. He was not mistaken. When he reached the end of the garden and looked up he perceived an extremely pretty damsel, who was leaning so far out of her window that the slightest imprudent movement would probably have sufficed to overbalance her. The breeze was toying with her wavy golden ringlets, and her big blue eyes were full of tears. It seemed as if she were trying to distinguish something which the trees screened from her view.

For a moment the viscount was quite dazed by this young woman's loveliness. "Have you let anything fall, mademoiselle?" he asked politely.

"Oh, yes, monsieur," she answered "Be kind enough to look under the trees. I have let my bird-cage fall, and my poor little linnet must be killed."

Max retired under the trees, and looked around him on all sides, but without result. "I see nothing, mademoiselle," he said.

"Oh! dear me, dear me. The cage must have caught in a branch. My poor little bird must be dead."

"Do you really think that the cage has caught in one of the trees?"

"Oh! I'm certain of it."

"Very well then, I'll look."

"Oh I'm sorry to give you so much trouble, sir, but as you are so obliging let me tell you I think it is in that large plane tree."

"In that one?" asked Max pointing to a tree.

"No, in the next one—yes—there."

"Very good. The servants are not up yet but I will procure a ladder, and—

"A ladder!" And in spite of the distance the viscount could perceive that the pretty girl was smiling through her tears.

"After all," thought he, with a laugh, "I can certainly manage to climb that tree. The girl is charming, and no mistake, and my conduct will be all the more meritorious." And so saying, careless of his white hands, Max proceeded to scale the tree, discovered the cage, unhooked it from the branch to which it was suspended, and slipped down to the ground again with his precious burden. The pretty girl had been anxiously watching his movements.

"I have it!" cried the viscount.

"And is my linnet alive?"

"I should think so," and raising the cage he showed her that the bird was feeding.

"Oh, thank you, sir, thank you."

"I'll carry it round to you, mademoiselle," said Max, "if you will only tell me who to ask for."

"Oh, don't take that trouble, sir," replied the pretty girl, "I have a clothes line here and will let it down to you. I can easily haul up the cage."

"But, mademoiselle, it seems to me"—

"Oh, it won't take a minute." And the pretty girl thereupon retired into her room.

"The fact is that she is positively lovely," thought Max, "what hair and what eyes!" And as instinct mastered admiration he added, measuring the height from the ground to the window. "Friend linnet I should like to go up with you."

At this moment the pretty girl reappeared. "Here's the cord, sir," she said.

"Very good; let it down to me."

"Please tie the cage strongly. Don't spare the knots."

"Yes, yes, you may depend on me."

Thereupon Max fastened the cage to the cord, and the pretty girl carefully hauled it up to her window. At last it reached the sill, she grasped it with both hands, and leaning forward again exclaimed: "Thank you, sir, for your kindness, thank you, thank you." And then once more she retired into her chamber.

Max rubbed his eyes. "Dear me," said he, "Is this really myself? Have I really been climbing up that tree to catch a linnet." And he glanced at his grazed hands and trousers to convince himself that he was really awake. "To think that I didn't even induce her to tell me her name! Why I have been behaving like a schoolboy. However, I will find it out, for it's really impossible to be prettier than she is."

He sat down on a garden bench, but contrary to his hopes the pretty girl did not show herself again at her window. "Come, well it shall be for to-morrow," said Max to himself, and he went indoors again.

Having lighted another cigar he stretched himself on his divan, and after a few puffs, fell asleep. He dreamed that he had a fortune of a million a year, and that he was driving round the Bois de Boulogne in a carriage of massive gold, drawn by six horses of fabulous value, with the pretty girl to whom the linnet belonged.

III.

A MODERN BOHEMIAN.

MAX had just woken up when he heard a knock at his door. "Come in!" cried he; and immediately a servant entered.

"There is a person down-stairs, sir," said the valet, "He's rather shabbily dressed, and although it's still very early he insists on seeing you—His name is Monsieur Clodomir."

"Show him up by all means," replied Max, springing to his feet.

Seldom indeed did he show such alacrity, but then it must be mentioned that Clodomir was an intimate friend of his. When Max was a lad, brought up in the country by his fond weak mother, Clodomir had

been the companion of his games and studies. They had been pupils at the same college, had sat side by side on the same form, and later on, on reaching manhood, they had several times met in Paris. Friends they had always remained, despite the great difference of their respective positions. Clodomir dreamt of becoming a great author, but his family was highly incensed at the idea of his following literary pursuits, and he had been cast adrift with the intimation, that as he was such a fool he must shift for himself. "Clodomir" was merely his literary pseudonym for his real name was Horace Maisans, and his father was a wealthy vineyard proprietor and wine merchant of Macon. The old man was never tired of complaining about his son, whose "follies" he declared had made him bald, and who would unfailingly bring him to the workhouse and the grave. Clodomir was no doubt in a great measure a bohemian, but the "follies" his father spoke of, merely existed in the obstinate old vinegrower's imagination. In point of fact, far from leading a life of extravagance, Clodomir had to struggle against bitter misery. He was tall and thin, and his open intelligent face wore an expression of intense fatigue and worry. However, he shook the viscount cordially by the hand, and then in compliance with his request sat down beside him.

"I had almost given you up," exclaimed Max in a cordial tone, which showed that he had at least some good points left. "It is a century since I saw you last. However, at length you have deigned to come and see me, and I hope we shall see each other frequently in future. First of all, where do you live !"

"Well—nowhere for the present, answered Clodomir—"In fact, to tell you the truth, that is what has brought be here. Can you lend me forty francs ?"

"You don't live anywhere, and you want to borrow forty francs ? What can you do with such a beggarly sum ? I'm not rich now-a-days, unfortunately ; but still there is something left in my purse. Why not share with me ?"

"Thanks. I said forty francs, that's just what I require, and Heaven knows when I shall be able to refund them."

"Refund them ! but do you imagine"—

"Excuse me, pray. Do you care for my friendship ?"

"What a question !"

"Well, lend me what I ask for, nothing more ; and let me tell you that I will return you the sum as soon as I possibly can."

"My dear fellow, I really don't see the connection—"

"Between my friendship and this loan ? Then is my self-esteem to count for nothing ? To retain a friend, you know, a man ought to owe him as few obligations as possible."

"What a deplorable theory ! As if the duties of friendship—"

"Ah ! ah ! what a pretty expression !"

"Come, don't you believe in anything then ?"

"In very few things at all events. But seriously, you spoke of a theory just now. Let me give you mine. I admit that friendship is sometimes a strong bond ; but to sever the tie, very little, a mere nothing often suffices. I go further than that. Friendship is not possible without equality. In reality if I am under an obligation to you, I am

no longer your equal. I can no longer say what I like, my opinion becomes dependent on your's."

"What ridiculous pride!"

"Nevertheless, such is the case. Suppose one day I went further than you liked—who knows? Suppose I said something you didn't approve of? A friend is a tyrant at times. There are moments when a man's best friend becomes inexorable. Well, suppose we fell out, suppose we quarrelled. I hope we never shall, but the eventuality is a possible one. What would you say then? Shall I tell you? Why if folks spoke to you of me, you would shrug your shoulders with disdain, and no doubt remark, "Ah! that insipid rhymist whom I picked out of the gutter——"

"Come, Clodomir, you are positively insulting this morning."

"No, my dear fellow, I am not; only our points of view differ. You are still young—wait a few years more. But, come, let us talk of something else."

"With pleasure, but first of all, here is my purse. Take what you require. And now, tell me, how does it happen that you don't live anywhere?"

"Ah! you open my wound anew! I don't live anywhere because—because this happens to be the 15th July."

"How is that? Explain yourself."

"Why, because when a man has only a modest rental quarter-day falls on July the 8th, and landlords have the annoying habit of exacting punctual payment of their rent. I was unable to pay mine, and so I was ejected—turned out of doors, and politely requested to go and live somewhere else."

"Eh, but your furniture and your clothes?"

Clodomir began to laugh. "My furniture!" said he, "why I have left it as security for what I owed. Besides there wasn't much of it—a camp bedstead and a mattress. As for my clothes, I'm wearing them. Aren't they really remarkable?"

"The cut is original certainly."

"Well at all events that is my only suit. But don't be alarmed, I saved my papers. It would have been a misfortune and no mistake if they had been lost. Why, there was the manuscript of my romantic drama in nine acts, the first scene of which is laid on the summit of Mount Blanc, and the last in a mine in Siberia. It is written in verse from first to last, and embellished with puns and all sorts of jokes. There is a ballet in the third act, and a charade is introduced in the fourth one. I call that a new idea and no mistake. The spectators who guess the charade will be entitled to a prize—a magnificent prize—a volume of verse by myself at trade price—that is three francs and a half in lieu of five! Come what do you say to that?"

Clodomir made this fantastic speech in such a serious tone that Max was positively stupefied, and began to ask himself if his friend was not a little bit touched in the head. However, the bohemian at last burst into a laugh, and the viscount realised that he had been joking.

"That is all very pretty," said Max. "But tell me, where did you live when you *had* a home?"

"When I had a home, my dear viscount, I had no clothes."

"No clothes?" exclaimed Max, relapsing into stupefaction.

"At all events, I could not have presented myself here in those which I possessed, and I did not ask you to call on me because I hadn't even a chair for you to sit down upon. That is the truth. However, if you want to know where I lived it was close by. I could even see your garden from a neighbour's window."

"What!" From that little window at the end of the grounds?"

"Precisely."

"But it is a pretty girl who lives there—a perfect beauty."

"Ah!" ejaculated the bohemian, losing his satirical air. "Do you know her, then?"

"Yes and no. It's quite a pastoral. I'll tell you all about it after breakfast, for as you are here you must at least breakfast with me."

Clodomir consented, and Max at once rang the bell and gave his orders. While the meal was in progress the conversation mainly turned on the bohemian's own adventures during the year that Max had lost sight of him, but as soon as the viands were cleared away, the viscount produced some of his fragrant cigars, and in accordance with his promise proceeded to recount the morning's adventure.

Clodomir listened attentively to his friend's story, and did not once attempt to interrupt him. But when the viscount had finished, he leant forward, and with some eagerness exclaimed: "All that is very poetical no doubt, especially as you have related it, Max; but would it be indiscreet to inquire what are your intentions respecting that young girl?"

"Oh no; they are simple enough."

"Then what do you mean to do?"

"Why, I shall offer her a comfortable abode and a carriage, and in three months' time, if she is as 'cute as pretty, she will have deserted me. I'm only a poor viscount in leading strings, you know, and she will no doubt find some wealthier protector—a Moldavian grandee or a Russian prince. But I shall have brought her out; I shall have rendered her the first service——"

"A fine service indeed! Do you know, Max, that plan of yours is simply infamous?"

The viscount laughed. His friend's high-flown notions of morality seemed to afford him intense amusement.

"Yes, infamous!" continued Clodomir. "Besides, how do you know that this young girl won't spurn your offers with indignation?"

"Oh, she won't refuse them!"

"How do you know that she isn't a hard-working, virtuous girl, prizing her honour as highly as the proudest duchess of your noble faubourg?"

"What, really, my poor Clodomir?" rejoined the viscount, with an air of compassion. "You were so sceptical a little while ago, and yet you are weak enough to believe in these things?"

"Yes, I believe in them, and firmly too. And, besides, what does it matter to you? Whether she be virtuous or not, what right have you to trouble her life? If she be virtuous, why play the part of a tempter? Why ruin her? why make an unfortunate the more? And if she isn't virtuous, maybe she is bound by ties that would make all your efforts unavailing."

Max smiled again. "I'm beginning to understand," said he.

"Understand ? Understand what ?"

"Tell me how long you were this damsel's neighbour ?"

"For about a year and a half."

"And so you don't want me to shoot over your preserves ?"

"My preserves ! I swear to you——"

"Don't swear."

"I give you my word of honour that I have not spoken to her a dozen times. I was only in her room on one occasion when she was away."

"But, then, why do you take such interest in her ?"

"Because she is deserving of interest ; because she is a poor, virtuous, hard-working girl, without parents or friends."

"But, Clodomir, why not simply say——"

"Why, my dear fellow, I have nothing to say of the kind you mean."

"Take care—mind, you are leaving me an open field. Come, confess it, you love her ?"

"Not at all ! Ah, me ! Can't a man do anything without having some hidden motive for his conduct. What I have said to you about Louise——"

"Ah ! So her name is Louise !" ejaculated Max.

"Or Jeanne or Julia, I'm sure I don't know," replied his friend with an impatient air, which greatly amused the young viscount. "What I have said to you about her, I should have said about any other young girl in similar circumstances. Your design is simply infamous. Laugh as much as you like, but come don't tarnish your escutcheon."

"Ah ! Clodomir. I'm certain now, she's your innamorata."

"No, upon my honour."

"Well, well, let it be so ; only remember I have warned you of what I mean to do."

At this moment the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of several of Maxime's friends. Without relating the morning's adventure, the viscount told them that he was in love with a pretty girl of humble rank, and amused them prodigiously by describing Clodomir's virtuous scruples. The newcomers had already looked upon the stranger with astonishment, for whilst they, themselves, were attired in the pink of perfection, the bohemian's garments were sadly soiled and shabby. His theories now transformed him into a very wondrous being indeed.

The talk soon became general, and each of Maxime's friends expounded his views in turn. Clodomir's theories were utterly scouted, but he nevertheless maintained everything he had said, and without mincing matters in the least degree, told his "noble" adversaries what he thought of them and their notions. In fact, the discussion became most heated and strong words were used on either side.

"Come, come," said one of Max's friends—a puny little baron with an ape-like face. "The girl is evidently your mistress."

"On my honour she isn't," answered Clodomir once more.

"Well do you mean to marry her since you have made yourself the champion of her virtue ?" queried another of Max's comrades.

"Perhaps she is your sister, and you would rather not own her," remarked the Chevalier de Castelmoroni, a conceited young swell who had

bought his title from the pope, and whose father, a horse-dealer, rejoiced in the vulgar name of Trippard.

"No, she is not my sister in the sense you insinuate," cried Clodomir with flushed cheeks and in a quivering voice. "No, she is no relation of mine, in that sense, but she is none the less my sister in the name of humanity, which you forget—"

"Bravo! continue pray."

"And that is a relationship which I won't deny—a relationship no man with a true heart would blush for. She is my sister, for poor and lonely she labours to earn her living; and the toil of days and nights does not suffice to provide for her wants. Her beauty is but an additional misfortune, since it exposes her to every temptation. She is my sister, since, as society is constituted, she has no one to defend her—no one. Her only shield is her virtue, the consciousness of duty—and do you know how hard it is to resist temptation, when hunger presses you, and when a word would suffice to bring you luxury?"

Maxime's friends laughed no longer, but looked at each other in amazement. As Clodomir paused, however, the Chevalier de Castel-moroni sarcastically exclaimed—"Dear me, this man must be the apostle of some new religion!"

Clodomir rose—too irritated to remain any longer in such company, and without a word, a bow, or a gesture of taking leave, abruptly walked out of the room.

"Eh! Max," inquired the chevalier, "what is that preposterous fellow's name?"

"Hector Maisans. He was my schoolfellow when I was a lad."

Then as Max had not been able to go to Chantilly on the previous day, his friends described the racing for his benefit; duly recounting the exploits of "Miss Betsy," "Tambour Major," and "Pudding"—the famous English horse who galloped his three miles without the slightest effort, and who had just changed hands for the modest sum of a hundred thousand francs.

As for Clodomir, as soon as he found himself in the street, he gave vent to his pent-up anger. For a moment he almost felt enraged with himself. "After all," said he, "it wasn't worth my while to defend a girl I scarcely know. Am I a blockhead? All those young swells poked fun at me atrociously. Were they in the right? Perhaps so; and yet I prefer to think not. Ay, I acted rightly. I know that young girl. During a year and a half I lived near her. Was she not most virtuous and laborious? Come, it seems I'm taking extraordinary interest in her. Am I in love? what madness! That would be the crowning folly; it cannot, must not be. I can't even suffice for my own wants. My means don't allow me to think of—And yet, if I'm so grieved at having had to leave my old quarters it is on account of her—Really I ought to warn her of Max's intentions—put her on her guard—But perhaps she herself would laugh at me! Come, come, Max was decidedly in the right, and his friends as well."

IV.

PRESENTS AND PROPOSALS.

WHEN the Viscount de Tressang woke up on the following morning his first thought was for the pretty girl whom he had espied at the little casement. Skilful inquiries had procured him the information that her name was Louise Blain; that she had no relations, and that she lived quite alone, received no visits, and only went out to fetch or return her work—valuable old lace which she was most expert in repairing.

The viscount was far from being timid, and yet a feeling he had never experienced before deterred him from knocking at the garret door and making the proposal he had spoken of to Clodomir. Like some lovesick Arcadian shepherd he spent his time wandering through the grounds, and watching Louise's window. For hours he would recline on the garden bench near the plane trees and listen to her while she sang at her work. Her voice was quite untrained, and she had plainly no technical knowledge of music; and yet to our enamoured hero her notes seemed most delightfully harmonious. He indeed decided in his own mind that Louise surpassed the most renowned vocalists of the day, albeit that she merely sang popular refrains, such as are murdered by screeching hurdygurdies in every court and alley. Some days elapsed without Max prosecuting his adventure any further; but at length one evening he remarked to himself, "I can't remain in this state, I must come to some decision."

The result of his meditations was that, on the morrow, a servant attired in the Tressang livery, knocked at Louise's door and presented her with a note, the very terseness of which was calculated to insinuate all kinds of things. "Mademoiselle," said the *billet*, "to see you is to love you. I have seen you. With one word it is in your power to make me the happiest of men. Will you say that word? *Your* apartment is ready. *Your* carriage awaits the answer at your door."

Louise read the note and then folded it up again. "This letter cannot be for me," she said to the servant. "Take it back. A mistake has been made."

"But mademoiselle," began the lackey.

Without listening to him, however, the young girl opened the door, and her glance was so significant that the servant paused, bowed, and abruptly left the room.

When the viscount heard of the result of this embassy he consoled himself with the thought: "She can't have understood me. She must have fancied I was poking fun at her; so what I must do is to convince her that my offers are real."

Accordingly on the following day he got together all the ready money that was available—some ten thousand francs or so—and purchased a variety of handsome presents, a cashmere shawl, some valuable lace, a piece of silk, and several beautiful jewels. Everything was carefully packed inside a tasteful corbeille, which was placed in Louise's room, thanks to the connivance of the doorkeeper of the house

(liberally rewarded for her pains), whilst the young girl was absent on an errand.

Alone in the garden Max anxiously watched and waited. Surely Louise would not be proof against such temptation. "She will show herself at the window," thought the viscount, "and then I will appear." But it was in vain that he loitered under the tall plane trees, smoking an incalculable number of cigars. Louise did not show herself; and in lieu of perceiving her the viscount at last caught sight of his valet hurrying towards him from the house. "A large parcel had just arrived," said the servant. In fact Louise had returned the corbeille.

This time the viscount was stupefied. "It's a miracle!" said he. "Here's a wonderfully beautiful young woman who is not merely poor, but virtuous as well! Clodomir was right after all. But what am I to do, for there is no mistaking it, I am head over heels in love."

Ay, what was he to do? The viscount racked his brain trying to think of some novel stratagem which might change Louise's disposition. But despite all his efforts he could imagine nothing. In a few days his passion, for it had become a passion, acquired intense development. Society became odious to him; he forsook his favourite club and the once-all-attractive gambling table; and experienced sensations he had never so much as dreamt about before. By a kind of intuition he now divined Louise's character, and realised that the slightest audacity would inevitably ruin all his chances. He passed his time either in the garden, or else in roaming round about the house where Louise lived, hoping that he might perhaps catch a glimpse of her out of doors, since she no longer showed herself at the window. One evening whilst he was in the garden he espied her in her room, putting on her bonnet. "She is going out," he thought, and he immediately hurried into the street. But it took him some time to make the round, and when he reached the young girl's house she was already gone. "Well, at least I shall see her come home," thought the viscount, and he remained on the watch during the whole evening. The rain fell in torrents, but he did not budge. When at last Louise passed up the street he divined rather than saw her, so swiftly did she walk. Still he went home quite joyful, albeit that he was wet through.

Louise was well aware of the impression she had produced on the viscount. In the first instance, in refusing his offers and presents, she had acted without an afterthought. "He will forget me to-morrow," she decided; and now Max's strange persistency and timidity greatly surprised her.

In the midst of his indecision and uncertainty, the viscount would no doubt have been surprised to learn that his cause was gaining ground. He was not an expert love-maker. In fact, few men of our generation have a proper acquaintance with the tender sentiment. Love has become a bargain, and thus in offering Louise a number of costly presents, Max considered it certain that he would win her heart. He was mistaken, as events had shewn. However, his after indecision saved him; for by remaining in inaction, by contenting himself with passive but obstinate admiration, he played the proper part, the only one that could possibly conduce to ultimate success.

Louise had not merely been surprised, but she had felt positively

indignant, on receiving Max's presents ; whereas now his timidity, his love-lorn air prompted forgiveness, if not something of an even more tender nature. For she experienced a secret pleasure in watching him, a feeling which, with her inexperience, she could not exactly define, although it was undoubtedly the prelude of love. Yes, she had felt her heart beat faster at sight, at thought of Max. And what girl could have resisted ? Here was this young fellow of noble birth, of seeming wealth and power, whose audacity had not shrunk from insolence—here he was timid and crestfallen now, passing the entire day in watching whether he might not spy her for a single moment. She often left her workframe, and, hiding behind the window-curtain, looked at him as he paced restlessly to and fro under the tall planes. She noticed that he was fairly handsome, and more especially that he looked sad. By degrees his sadness so moved her, that at last she gave up hiding herself, and her smile met Max's glance when he looked towards the little casement.

One day an idea occurred to the viscount, and seemed to him an inspiration from heaven. His servants had failed in their embassies, why should he not be his own messenger ? Forthwith he fastened together three or four poles used for training the young trees in the garden, and thus provided, he managed, after several failures, to deposit one night a large bouquet of roses on Louise's window-sill. Joyful indeed did he feel when on the morrow he perceived the flowers arranged in a large blue vase in front of the window. And more than that, Louise thanked him with a graceful smile.

Each morning afterwards she found a fresh nosegay on the window-sill. Her fears had vanished now ; she loved the viscount, and let her thoughts float down the stream without asking herself whither it might bear her.

But one day Max wrote to her, and, respectful as his letter was, it revived all Louise's apprehensions. A terrible thought arose in her mind. Was she fated to become his mistress ? She shrunk instinctively from the idea of such a future. Girls of the poorer classes who have neither fathers nor mothers nor relatives nor friends to protect and defend them, possess necessarily some knowledge of evil, else how could they resist it ? Vice surrounds them, bold and cynical, without respect for either youth or beauty. They elbow shame, and know what fate awaits them if they fall. Examples are there before their eyes.

Thus Louise was terrified on receiving Max's letter, and anxiously questioned her heart. And as she realised the truth—the truth that she loved Max—she thought of flight as her only means of safety. Yet she remained—vowing, however, that she would fight against this love which had crept unawares into her heart—vowing that she would avoid Max, avoid even his glance. The days passed, and she clung strenuously to her vow. Max was in despair. The most beautiful flowers of the garden lay withered on Louise's window-sill, or else at the foot of the wall where they had fallen. Apparently she no longer cared for these floral offerings. She hid herself moreover ; a large curtain was hung before her window, and screened her effectively from view.

To say the truth, her sufferings were as acute as Max's. One morning she received another letter, and fancying at first that it came from

Max, she hesitated whether she should open it. But at last feminine curiosity mastered fear, and she tore the envelope open. To her surprise, however, the letter was not from Max, but from her old neighbour, the bohemian, Clodomir.

Clodomir had changed, changed considerably. His father—for once relenting—had sent him five hundred francs; a boulevard theatre had accepted a play he had written; and a second class newspaper was not merely taking his “copy,” but actually paying for it. So Clodomir now had a real apartment, and slept in a real bed. To quote his own words, he dressed “with fashionable grace;” and to make up for lost time, he indulged in three meals a day. Moreover, he was settling down. Formerly, whenever he had a “wind-fall,” it had been his wont to assemble all his friends and acquaintances, and regale them with a banquet; whereas now, he scouted such improvident prodigality. He even thought of paying his debts. “I am becoming respectable,” he said to himself. “Is it the effect of age?” But more surprising still, this is what he wrote to Louise:—

“Mademoiselle—yesterday I was too poor to ask you what I wish to ask to-day. I love you. Will you be my wife? Allow me to call on you to-morrow for your answer.”

This missive fairly stupified Louise. She knew Clodomir; she remembered him. He was a man of talent, of high honour, and great moral probity. Could she accept his offer? Would she not thus defeat Max’s attempt to seduce her—supposing such to be his intentions; would she not escape from this life of solitude with all its hardships and temptations, from the fear of old age, illness, and misery?

Louise was the daughter of a contractor named Blain—an active, hardworking, intelligent man, who had risen to easy circumstances, which enabled him to give Louise some little education. But a banker’s failure ruined him, and he was so crushed by the blow that he did not survive it. For three years Louise lived under her mother’s care, but Madame Blain, in her turn was called to the tomb, and at eighteen years of age the poor girl remained alone—an orphan and virtually friendless. Her mother’s illness had been an expensive one, and when the doctor and the chemist were paid there only remained to her a little stock of furniture, part of which she sold to procure a small sum. She was reduced to work for her livelihood, and by toiling far into the night she managed to earn some fifteen francs a week. As for the future, her only look-out was misery or the hospital.

Under such circumstances, no wonder if she were greatly agitated on receiving Clodomir’s letter. All day long she was unable to work, and her night was passed in anxious perplexing thoughts. Ah! if Max had only written her that letter—but no; Max’s love would be luxury, splendour perhaps—but splendour coupled with shame. And he would not love her always; indeed, perchance, he would soon abandon her, and then she would be reduced to solitude once more—solitude embittered by remorse.

At last the morrow came, and Louise was still undecided.

There was a knock at her door, and Clodomir appeared upon the threshold. “Mademoiselle,” said he in a trembling voice, “I have come to learn my destiny.”

Louise made an effort to answer. "I trust, monsieur," she said "that you will believe in my gratitude for the unexpected, un hoped-for offer you have made to me. But I must not, I cannot—" She could say no more, tears were starting from her eyes.

"Then you refuse mademoiselle—" began Clodomir.

"Oh, monsieur, pray believe—"

"Ah !" cried the bohemian. "A curse on my foolish pride, on my petty, foolish, miserable, false shame ! Why did I delay ? I realise it now—yow love another." And as Louise remained silent he continued "Yes, I am sure of it ; and yet I—I have long loved you. My proposal is that of an honest man, who asks you to share his happiness and sorrows, whilst the other—"

"Oh, spare me, monsieur—"

"Perhaps I have been too abrupt, too pressing, mademoiselle, perhaps you would prefer to reflect."

"No, monsieur, no ; henceforth it is impossible," answered Louise, who had become as pale and as frigid as marble. "It is impossible," she repeated in a lower tone : "adieu."

"I am going, mademoiselle, but before doing so—forgive what I am about to say—perhaps some day you may need a friend, a true friend's help—Remember me, and count upon me." Then laying his card on a corner of Louise's work frame, he turned and left the room. Tears were streaming from his eyes. "Ah, I loved her, I loved her," he gasped, "I would have made her my wife, but she is Max's mistress, now—the plaything of his fancy. Ah ! I will revenge myself."

In the meanwhile, seated on a garden bench, Max had espied Clodomir in Louise's room ; and on his side also, he now fancied he could guess the truth. "Fool, triple fool !" he cried. "She has fooled me, and I love her !" And clenching his fists he added—"And she, she loves Clodomir, the disinterested defender of outraged virtue. How they must laugh at me !"

At this thought Max, thoroughly infuriated, hastened off to Clodomir's abode, rushing in like a madman. The bohemian had just reached home. They both had great difficulty in restraining themselves, for prompted by the same thought, their first impulse was to spring at each other's throats.

"Clodomir," cried the viscount. "Louise is your mistress. She loves you. You denied it to me once before, but now I know everything." And he finished with a threatening gesture.

"Read that," replied the bohemian, throwing on the table his letter, which Louise had returned to him. "Read that, read my offer. You will see which of us two—"

"I swear by my mother's memory," rejoined Max, "that she is not my mistress !"

"Then listen to me, I wished to make Louise my wife. False shame prevented me from owning it. I have long loved her, she can only be your's on conditions that she becomes your wife. She shall never be your mistress whilst I live. And now, farewell. In crossing my path you have destroyed the dearest dream of my life. Make Louise happy and honoured, and then, perchance, I may still remain your friend—but otherwise no, a thousand times no !"

Clodomir did not add another word, nor did Max think of rejoicing. Leaving the bohemian to himself, he slowly retraced his steps homeward, absorbed in thought. For the first time the idea of marrying Louise was presented to him, and his mind, his heart, had so changed during the last six months, that this idea, which would once have seemed supremely ridiculous, now appeared almost a natural one. In fact, he calculated whether it would be difficult to realise. What would his friends and his acquaintances think of such a marriage? That was the great point; for above everything he must avoid appearing ridiculous. "The originality of the thing will save me," thought he, "I will make as much stir as possible. It will be a perfect sensation, but a week afterwards everyone will have forgotten it. Now-a-days men only marry for money. I shall have all the sentimental women, and excitable people on my side."

As for his father, the rigid Count de Tressang, Max considered it would be tolerably easy to obtain his consent, providing he presented matters in a certain light. Old prejudices and scruples were all conquered, and the viscount decided to follow Clodomir's advice. Indeed a few mornings afterwards he knocked at Louise's door. "Mademoiselle," said he, without the least preamble, "I have come to ask you if you will be my wife."

V.

THE HEIRESS OF THE NOBLE FAUBOURG.

IN those days Mademoiselle Henriette de Chevonceux was the dream of all the ruined young "swells" of Paris. She was a tall girl with fair hair, endowed at the same time with immense wealth and an extremely nasty temper. Nor should we forget to mention that despite her height she was gifted with a hump, which no prodigy of the dressmaking art was able to conceal.

Mademoiselle de Chevonceux was twenty-three years of age, and ruled despotically in the mansion of the Rue de Varennes, where she resided with her mother, an aged coquette, who was for ever seeking to efface time's troublesome blemishes, but whose age was, nevertheless, perfectly perceptible beneath repeated layers of pearl powder and carmine. This respectable marchioness idolised her daughter to the astonishment of all who were acquainted with, and had consequently suffered from, Mademoiselle Henriette's execrable temper. "A case of maternal blindness," said some; but in point of fact the marchioness's affectionate indulgence, passionate admiration, and unchangeable tenderness, had a very different cause. The deceased Marquess de Chevonceux, a hard *viveur*, and a desperate gambler, had left but little money behind him—some fifteen thousand francs a year or so; in fact, just enough for his relict to live in a state of genteel poverty. But it so happened that a miserly old uncle had bequeathed his entire fortune, modestly valued at five or six millions of francs, to Mademoiselle Henriette.

Now Henriette was of age and possessed a will of her own. She kept the keys of the cash-box, and whilst maintaining the house on a princely

footing took due and careful note of each item of receipt and expenditure. Certainly whenever she had a whim to satisfy she sowed money broadcast, and she was particularly generous as regards her mother's fancies. But in exchange for her liberality she demanded not merely indulgence, but, so to say, impassive obedience from the marchioness. She had quietly explained to the old lady, that if she were not obeyed, she should simply marry and cast her adrift without making her the least allowance. Now if this contingency had in the one sense become the marchioness's bugbear, fear of it had also prompted that display of maternal love and indulgence, which folks, who were not in the secret, always wondered at.

One morning, at the time we write of, Henriette abruptly presented herself in her mother's room. It was barely nine o'clock, and the marchioness was still sound asleep, for, far into the night, she had been playing whist with His Reverence Monsignor the Archbishop of Araria, the dowager Duchess de Piécrotté, and the Vidame de Pontauchoux. But regardless of her slumber her daughter abruptly woke her up. "Mother," said she, "I want to speak with you at once."

"Is it really necessary you should do so *at once*?" pleaded the marchioness with a yawn, as she raised herself slightly on her pillows.

"Yes, at once, mother."

"Then I'm listening, only I don't hide from you, Henriette, that I am really dreadfully tired this morning."

"Oh! I shall have finished in a moment, mother, only I wished to tell you that at last I have found a husband to my taste, and that I mean to marry."

The marchioness sank back on her pillows and clasped her hands as if she were terrified.

"Oh! don't be afraid," resumed Henriette, "you shall remain with us; and as I shall still be the mistress, you will always be at home. Don't you believe in my affection?"

The marchioness breathed again. "I was not aware," said she, "that a new suitor had come forward. Who is he?"

"He has not come forward at all. Perhaps he has never thought of doing so," answered Henriette pensively.

"What? Then how? My dear girl, you forget the proprieties."

"But, mother, I relied on you."

"On me! What for?"

"Why, to smooth down the difficulties. The man I mean to marry is the Viscount de Tressang."

"Oh, Henriette! Remember he is ruined."

"That's an additional reason. He will owe me everything. Besides I have enough for two; and then his father is wealthy."

"But he has led such a very wild life."

"Then he must be anxious to settle down."

"But he's a gambler, my dear—just think, a gambler."

"That's false, mother, quite false."

"Well people say so, dear."

"Yes, those who are envious of him, no doubt; for really he is the handsomest and the most distinguished looking of all the young men we received this winter."

"Then he must have a great many enemies."

"Well, even supposing what they say is true, I will correct him; and besides I like him."

The marchioness remained silent; as usual, she was under her daughter's influence. But suddenly a new idea occurred to her, and she raised herself once more on her pillows—"But you scarcely know M. de Tressang, Henriette," said she.

"Enough to love him, mother."

"But my dear girl, that isn't a reason."

"Yes, mother, it is: at all events it is *my* reason."

"But I can't go and ask him to marry you. It would be ridiculous. People don't do such things. Has he noticed you? Has he paid you any attentions, spoken to you of marriage?"

"Oh no! not at all."

"Well, then?"

"But, mother," rejoined Henriette impatiently, "it is precisely on account of all that, that I relied on you to help me. Just think, I am growing old, and it is necessary I should marry. I am sure that the viscount would prove an excellent husband. Suppose I was reduced, later on, to marry some tyrannical minded man who would insist on separating us. I should be very grieved, indeed; and you, mother, I don't think you would care to leave me."

This little speech revived all the marchioness's apprehensions. She pictured herself alone, left to her own resources, without any money for pleasure, without even a carriage. "No, no, Henriette," she said, "you shall be spared that grief. I will not abandon you. But before doing anything, I must reflect how we can manage to satisfy your wishes."

"Oh, thanks, mother," rejoined Mademoiselle de Chevonceux, "I am reassured now. Remember, I rely on you." And so saying she left the room.

"What am I to do?" soliloquised the marchioness as soon as she found herself alone. "That girl cares nothing for the proprieties. She is quite regardless of what society may say. Ah! if I were only the mistress! It is absurd to think that I can go and ask the Viscount de Tressang for his hand; and, besides, what has become of him? People say that he has disappeared."

The fact is that none of Max's friends had seen him for a long while past; all inquiries at the family mansion receiving the same stereotyped reply:—"Monsieur le Vicomte is not at home." No doubt he had left Paris, said some of his acquaintances. Perhaps his father had sent him into exile, or might be he was at one of the fashionable spas with his invalid aunt. But no; the "watering" season was over. He must be in Italy, then; no doubt he had been carried off by some nymph of the ballet. All these contradictory rumours were discussed at length in the circle which Max had been in the habit of frequenting, but none of them were shown to be exact. The viscount's friends certainly never imagined that he was madly in love with a work-girl, and that he was entirely absorbed in this passion.

He and Louise were often together now, for their marriage was agreed upon; and Max was only waiting for a favourable occasion to obtain

his father's consent. He was happier than he had ever been before—happier by far than in those days of folly when he had carelessly scattered his gold and his youth to the winds; and Louise was happy also, for now, the future was Max's love and happiness, instead of misery and despair.

In the meanwhile the Marchioness de Chevonceux was endeavouring to think of some means of bringing about her daughter's marriage, without exposing herself to ridicule; for really she was in a most singular situation. Here was Henriette, the wealthiest heiress of the noble Faubourg St. Germain, courted by innumerable suitors whom she had one and all refused, and now intent on asking the ruined Viscount de Tressang to marry her. "Is it not preposterous!" thought the marchioness. "This madcap girl will be the death of me."

"Ah! if I were only a friend of the viscount's father—the old Count de Tressang," she added, "everything might then be arranged. He would understand a hint, and profit by it. But I have really not spoken to him four times in my life."

In the midst of the marchioness's perplexity, and whilst striving to recollect under what circumstances she had previously met the Count de Tressang, she suddenly remembered that some land belonging to her daughter in Burgundy adjoined one of the count's estates. They were country neighbours, so to say, but how could she profit of this circumstance, for the count seldom if ever left Paris. At this point a bright idea occurred to the marchioness. Might she not stir up some frivolous little lawsuit about encroachment or right of way? The lawsuit could be made to conduct to a compromise. To effect this compromise the interested parties must have one or more interviews together; and these interviews could but lead to a reconciliation. Then with a little skill the count might easily be induced to present his son as a suitor for Henriette's hand.

When her mother acquainted her with this little plan, Mademoiselle Henriette condescended to approve of it; and three days later her agent in Burgundy, being secretly instructed, felled three poplar trees belonging to the Count de Tressang, which the latter, so the agent said, had planted without the least right on the bank of a ditch intervening between his land and Mademoiselle de Chevonceux's. The act was a most arbitrary one, and the pretention altogether preposterous. The count flew into a violent rage, and what the marchioness had foreseen occurred. A law suit was commenced. Mademoiselle de Chevonceux upbraided her agent. A compromise was talked of. Indeed the marchioness wrote the count such a fulsome apology, that he could not possibly resist her proposal for a reconciliation. They had three interviews together which put him on the scent, and after a little private conversation with Henriette he divined her thoughts and wishes. He realised that Max was offered a superb position, above anything he could have hoped for in his present impoverished circumstances, and he went home highly elated and determined to profit of the first opportunity to ask Mademoiselle de Chevonceux if she were willing to accept the Viscount Gustave Adolphe Maxime de Tressang, his son, for her husband.

VI.

THE DREAM AND THE REALITY.

LOUISE was working at her frame ; and, seated near the window, Max looked at her lovingly and talked.

"On the banks of the Loire," he said, "between Montcoreau and Candes—the most delightful strip of country in the world—we will have a charming country house. It shall be built midway up some slope, crowned by a wood of sombre foliaged chestnut-trees. The garden shall be laid out in terraces, and watered by a rivulet winding through the copses. All the walls shall be decked with roses or fruit trees, or else with jasmine and honeysuckle. Lower down the hill will be a little wood with flowery pathways, edged with strawberries and violets ; the periwinkles shall twine around the trunks of the young trees, and their little blue flowers will stand out against the dark leaves like the stars shine forth in the deep azure vault. Then comes a meadow, gently sloping towards the stream, and girt round about with tall poplars and with willows dipping their branches in the Loire."

"Yes," said Louise, "but we must have a dairy and an aviary ; and my poor little linnet, whom I love so much, will no longer remain lonesome in his little cage."

"We will have all kinds of birds."

"And a poultry-yard."

"Certainly, and pigeons."

"What nice walks in the morning."

"Yes, and rides as well."

"And in the evening ?"

"Oh, for the evening, we shall have a light, swift boat. The Loire is so beautiful in summer when the moonlight streams over the poplars and the woods, the slopes, and houses."

* * * * *

Max's marriage with Mademoiselle de Chevonceux had been decided on by the Count de Tressang and the marchioness. Henriette was to bring her husband an income of 200,000 francs, abandoning the remainder of her fortune to her mother. The count on his side had agreed to present his son with half a million of francs. It was he who stipulated the various conditions which were to figure in the marriage contract. The marchioness scarcely made a single suggestion ; indeed she had Henriette's instructions to agree to everything that the count might propose.

So the money question being decided, it only remained for M. de Tressang to present his son formally as a suitor. He would be immediately authorised to pay his court, and the marriage should take place during the ensuing spring.

"To-morrow," said the count to himself, "I will acquaint Max with his great good fortune." Excellent father as he was, he imagined that his son would be delighted. Such a position ! Fancy—two hundred thousand francs a year !

* * * * *

Max still lingered in the little garret. "Louise," said he "we cannot remain like this any longer. To-morrow I will ask my father for his consent. Perhaps he will hesitate at first, but I will persuade him, convince him. And if the worst happened, we could do without his consent."

"No, Max, I could not become your wife under such circumstances; but tell your father how happy we shall be, how happy we will make him. Why, I love him already, Max. No, he will not hesitate."

"No, surely no," rejoined the viscount. And he believed what he said, for whilst expecting some resistance, he felt convinced of ultimate victory.

* * * * *

Father and son had both made up their minds to speak, and strangely enough they had each selected the same day, and the same occasion—dinner-time. They were both equally impatient for the hour to arrive, and yet the count was not without misgivings as to the success of his scheme. "Max," thought he, "does not care for money, and, without her fortune, Mademoiselle de Chevonceaux would scarcely be a desirable wife. However, he must obey me. I am the master after all; and he is my son."

"What will my father say?" thought Max, on his side. "A young girl without a name, parents, or fortune; in fact, a simple work girl. Still she shall be my wife, I'm determined on it. I must be firm and he will give way. He can't wish to make me unhappy for life, for after all he's my father."

When the dinner-bell rang Max went down-stairs, full of resolution. Contrary to rule he found his father in great good-humour. "How lucky I am," thought the young viscount. "With address, eloquence, persuasion, and energy, I shall gain the fight. Let us attack the enemy at once."

And he opened his mouth to speak, but the count forestalled him.

"I suppose you have heard speak of Mademoiselle Henriette de Chevonceaux, my dear Max."

"Certainly I have, father."

"She is a most charming young person," resumed the count.

"Charming," echoed Max, impatient to broach another subject of far more interest to his idea.

"She is an excellent musician."

"Excellent."

"She paints beautifully, I am told."

"Beautifully."

"If I remember rightly, you greatly admired some water-colour drawings she brought back from Italy last year."

"I wanted to say to you father—" ventured Max.

But the count did not let his son finish. "Mademoiselle de Chevonceaux is wealthy," he said.

"Yes, very wealthy."

"She bears one of the noblest names in France."

Max made no rejoinder.

"Let us resume," proceeded his father. "She has talents, rank, position, and immense wealth. The man who marries her will be a lucky fellow."

"Very lucky."

"Then you may congratulate yourself, my dear Max."

"Congratulate myself? Why, pray?"

"Why, because the matter's settled."

"Eh! what!" asked the viscount in surprise.

"Yes, it's settled," repeated the count, gleefully rubbing his hands together. "Haven't you just now told me that Mademoiselle de Chevonceux's husband would be a lucky man?"

"But father—"

"You have just told me so, haven't you?"

"But—"

"Well, you are to be that lucky man. Your consent alone was wanting. But now you give it; and so Mademoiselle de Chevonceux will be your wife."

A thunderbolt falling on the table would have caused Max less terror. "But it's impossible, father!" cried he.

"And why, sir, if you please?"

"Why?"

"Yes, why?"

"But first of all Mademoiselle Henriette is humpbacked."

"That's false."

"I'm sure of it."

"'Tis a mere rumour which her enemies circulate."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes, her enemies. Is that the only impossibility?"

"No—everyone is acquainted with her deplorable temper. No one excepting her mother can abide near her. Her will is most tyrannical."

"You will be master in your own home. Is that everything?"

"My home can't be a hell. Finally, I don't like her."

"That's a pity."

"Nevertheless it is so."

"Really?" asked the count with a bantering air.

"Yes, I don't like her—in fact, I consider her horrible."

"Then I repeat it's a great pity for—" The count paused.

"For?" queried Max.

"For I've given my word to the Marchioness de Chevonceux."

Max bounded from his chair. "It seems to me," said he, "that my opinion ought to have been asked."

"Well, I've just asked it."

"But I refuse my consent."

"It won't be needed."

"That's too much! We'll just see!"

"Yes, we'll see, sir," retorted the count in a passionate voice. "We'll see if I'm the master; we'll see which of us two has to give way!"

His threatening manner fanned Max's courage. "Listen to me, father," said he, "I swear before God that Mademoiselle de Chevonceux shall never be my wife."

"Don't swear."

"I swear it on my honour."

"Very good. Only as I don't want to be too hard on you, I will allow you a month's reflection. We are now the 25th October. On the

25th November you shall acquaint me finally with your intentions. But remember that you owe everything to me ; that you have nothing of your own left ; that you are dependent on what I am willing to give you. That will do ; the matter need not be mentioned again till the time I have named."

"But I don't need to reflect."

"Yes, yes, reflect," rejoined the count rising from table. "I have an interview with the marchioness this evening to settle certain clauses of the contract." So saying he left the room.

"Good Lord !" cried Max as soon as he was alone.—"We'll see—we'll see and no mistake. To think of my marrying that horrible girl—never, never !" and the viscount enforced his words by striking such a violent blow on the table that five or six plates and glasses were shattered and fell in fragments on to the floor.

Hearing the smash, a servant hastened in. "Did monsieur the viscount ring?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Max, "for you to pick these things up," and he strode out of the room.

* * * * *

"Well?" asked the Marchioness de Chevonceux as soon as she had exchanged greetings with the Count de Tressang that evening. "Well, have you spoken to the viscount?"

"I have not had a thorough explanation with Max," artfully replied the count. "To say the truth, he is not very well and keeps to his room."

"Then you have not told him—"

"Oh ! I've told him just a little—in fact, I have hinted the matter to him."

"And what did he reply?"

"Well, between us, I believe that he is delighted."

"Really."

"Yes, and yet I was very circumspect on account of his ill health."

The marchioness looked suspiciously at the count, but his glance did not waver.

"My daughter knows nothing as yet," said Madame de Chevonceux, (Henriette, indeed, was supposed to be ignorant of these transactions.)

"But might I not mention the matter to her?"

"Oh ! not yet," M. de Tressang hastily rejoined. "Wait a few days longer."

"Count, you are hiding something from me."

"Marchioness, I assure you—"

"Come, be frank."

"Well, yes, I will tell you the truth."

"So there is something then—some difficulty, eh ? What is it ?"

"Oh ! I know nothing for certain ; only I fear—well, I fear my son has some love affair afoot. Nothing of consequence you know—probably some mere passing fancy. I'm not positive, mind you, but I shall know for certain to-morrow."

"Then I had better wait before saying anything to Henriette?"

"Yes—just a few days ; it would be more prudent. But there is no reason for you to be in the least degree alarmed, marchioness. Re-

member you have my word, and my son would never think of leading me to break it."

"Oh ! in that case, then, surely I might speak to Henriette."

"You cunning old fox," thought the count, "you want to find out if there is anything amiss ; to punish you, you sha'n't know anything." And he added aloud : "Well, yes ; you might do so after all. On reflection I don't think it would do any harm. Indeed, perhaps the reverse."

"I was mistaken," the marchioness decided : "he *has* told me the truth. And now I must tell everything to Henriette."

VII.

LOVE OR WEALTH ?

MAX on his side had hastened to acquaint Louise with the unexpected result of his interview with his father. She had been waiting impatiently for his return, and she was seized with a painful presentiment when she beheld him—for his distracted glance and excited air betrayed the bitterness of his grief.

"Oh ! Louise, Louise !" he cried, "I am most miserable, most wretched."

"What has happened ?" she asked in an anxious trembling voice.

"I have been unable to speak to my father—but he has spoken to me. He has decided that I am to marry some one else."

Having partly divined the truth as soon as she perceived Max, the blow, now that it came, seemed less terrible to Louise. To all appearance she was quite calm.

"Yes," resumed Max, "he has decided to marry me—to marry me in spite of myself, to Mademoiselle Henriette de Chevonceux, a hideous humpbacked heiress, with the most dreadful temper in the world."

"Your father no doubt perceives some advantage in the match."

"My father perceives that Mademoiselle de Chevonceux is tremendously wealthy, and that she bears one of the noblest names in France—but what is that, Louise ? Can wealth and rank give a single day's happiness ?"

"You are frank in talking like that, Max—no doubt ; but to-morrow your ideas might change."

"Change ? No, I shall never change. Even if my father disinherited me, cursed me—"

"Oh ! don't speak like that, I beg you."

"Why not ? Is my father always to be my ruler ? Is his will always to weigh upon my life ? What do I care for honours and fortune ! Haven't I learnt to despise them ? I should a thousand times prefer to have a sun ray in my life—the perfume of a flower, the smile of the woman I love !"

"All that is very well—when one is young—but later, later—"

"Ah ! later, it shall be the same. I am excited, no doubt, but remember I am no longer a child. My desires are no longer uncertain, my preferences confused. I have reached an age when a man should know what road to choose through life ; and I have chosen mine."

"Have you seriously reflected, Max?"

"What! do you fancy that a mere passing caprice guided me when I came and asked you, 'Louise, will you be my wife?' No, no; I had reflected beforehand. When I came and asked you that question, I knew that I should meet with obstacles; but after all what need I care for them, so long as you love me!"

"I love you, Max; I love you with all my heart, but I should have strength enough to stifle my love were it fraught with misfortune for you."

"Thanks, Louise, thanks a hundred times. What do I care for the rest! what do I care for my father's will? And besides an obstacle is an additional attraction."

"But, Max, a man should always obey his father."

"Louise, what I have said I feel. But, come, what is the matter with you? Instead of encouraging me and helping me—"

"I owe you the truth, Max; I owe it to myself as well."

"Ah! you never loved me!"

"This is not the moment to tell you if I have."

"Why not? Answer me frankly."

"Because at this moment, Max, your life and mine are at stake. Because you may yet retreat, for there is still time. Ah! think of the struggle you must engage in. The Viscount de Tressang would expose himself to many a cruel deception, many a pang and torment, by marrying Louise Blain, the lace worker!"

"I love you, Louise. That sums up everything. Who would dare to rail at me and brave me? I am not one of those men who fear the opinion of society, when a duty has to be performed. I follow my path to the end without caring for the croaking of the frogs. I made you an offer, Louise; you accepted it; and you shall be my wife!"

"Reflect, Max, reflect. Remember the future."

"What! Always these fears for the future, which, perhaps, we shall not reach! What do I care for to-morrow so long as to-day is mine!"

Louise made no rejoinder. Perhaps she was afraid of her own heart.

At last Max took his leave. He was surprised, and, indeed, grieved to find that Louise did not urge him to resist his father's wishes. Indeed, she scarcely seemed to approve of his resistance. Her manner had been singularly cold he thought, whereas he had expected her to show her gratitude. In fact, Max did not at all understand the delicacy of Louise's conduct. Such abnegation, such disinterestedness were as yet beyond his comprehension.

Unable to account for what he considered to be her callousness and apathy, and deeply grieved thereby, he did not pay her his usual visit the following day; which the Count de Tressang, on his side, devoted to obtaining information. Max's valet was only too willing to give the count his version of his young master's "goings on." The servant owed Louise a grudge for the way she had received him on the occasion when he called upon her as the viscount's envoy.

"I thought as much," exclaimed the count. "A little love affair. Well, we'll put a stop to it."

That same afternoon a footman, in full livery, knocked at Louise's door, "Here is a letter which my master, the Count de Tressang, sends

to mademoiselle," said he as soon as the young girl had opened the door; "I am to wait for an answer."

Louise opened the missive with trembling fingers, and read as follows :—

"Mademoiselle, you are young, and you are beautiful, and at my son's age, I should have worshipped you as he does himself; but I am told that your tact is on a par with your beauty. You will, therefore, understand the importance of what I have to communicate to you. My son has reached a time of life when, with such a name as he bears, it is necessary, indispensable, that he should marry. It has long been decided that he shall marry a woman who loves him, with whom he will be happy. Your connection with him should therefore cease; at least for the present. I will not speak of what might happen later on, provided you still care for him.

"In the meanwhile, however, I beg you to receive, in proof of the esteem I feel for your character, the enclosed state bond, and I trust that you will prevent my son from meeting you again, as these interviews could only compromise his future prospects. I have the honour to be, mademoiselle, your very obedient servant.

"DE TRESSANG."

Enclosed was a *coupon de rente* for 1,200 francs.

Louise slowly re-folded the letter, without thinking of the servant, who was waiting.

"What answer does mademoiselle desire me to give?" he asked.

"Return this to Monsieur de Tressang," she replied, and she handed him the *coupon*.

Once alone she burst into tears. "Oh, mother, mother, what humiliation," she cried, falling on her knees beside her bed, and clasping her throbbing head with both hands. She almost fancied she was going mad. But her prostration did not last long. She rose to her feet again, and new resolution sparkled in her eyes.

"Yes," she said, "the count is right. If ever I became Max's wife, I should be a burden to him—I should bring him misfortune. I realise it only too well from this letter written to me by the count. He never thought, perhaps, what a terrible insult it was. Yes, I can imagine what folks would think when Max introduced me to them as his wife. No, we cannot marry. It was a dream I did wrong to indulge in; an illusion which I must sacrifice. It made me too happy. Such happiness could not last! Ah, if Max were not a nobleman, if he did not belong to a wealthy family! If he were but a poor hardworking artisan!" For a moment she allowed this thought to linger, and her heart swelled as she pictured to herself the happiness which might have been.

But she was soon reminded of the painful reality. "I must be brave," she said to herself. "My love must be great enough and generous enough to accomplish a bitter sacrifice without a murmur." Then putting on her bonnet and her shawl, she left the room.

That evening, having sold her little stock of furniture—prized as it was—for a beggarly sum, she moved to one of those dingy, petty lodging dens, styling themselves "hotels," which abound in the populous alleys and by-streets round about the Rue St. Denis. At first

she thought of writing to Max, but on reflection she decided otherwise.

"Yes," said she, "the sacrifice must be complete. He must never know my love and devotion. But, O God! may he be happy; may his rich and noble wife lavish on him all the love which I once hoped to give him." And, seated at her little table with her face resting on her hands, she remained for long hours weeping for the happiness she had dreamt of, and which was not to be.

When Max returned on the morrow to Louise's old abode, he was stupefied to learn that she had left. The doorkeeper was altogether ignorant of her whereabouts. "A servant came," said he, "a tall fellow in a handsome livery, with a letter in his hand. He remained some time upstairs, and when he had gone, Mademoiselle Louise came down and went out. She returned with a furniture dealer, sold him everything excepting her clothes, and then went off in a cab without breathing a word as to where she was going."

"Fool that I was," thought Max, "I imagined she loved me. What a lesson! Some one else has been less respectful and more skilful than myself. However, I must try and find her."

During an entire week the viscount prosecuted his investigations, but it was trouble lost, for Louise could not be found. Two or three agents, employed to search for her, were obliged to confess that the task was above their capacity. Max was greatly discouraged, and in his vexation tried to prove to himself, by a series of specious reasons, that he cared for Louise no longer. The attempt did not prove successful, and yet the viscount at last consented to accompany his father to the Marchioness de Chevonceaux's. Henriette was supremely happy, the more so as at one moment she had feared her hopes would fail. The proud heiress—whose caustic language, masculine boldness, and superb disdain, were proverbial—showed herself most charming towards Max. She loved him, and willingly confessed to herself that she had found her master. She, who had always ruled, now longed for the privilege of obeying Max, in whose presence she became as timid and as candid as a school-girl.

The viscount was greatly surprised, and returned home in an altered frame of mind. "Does she really love me?" he asked himself. "Could I be happy with her? And then an income of two hundred thousand francs?" However, the idea of marrying for money was repugnant to him, and he was obliged to confess to himself that he felt no love for Henriette. His embarrassment could be traced on his features, and his father joyfully noted his perplexity. This was a first point gained, and the count might well be proud of his skill.

"My adventure is certainly singular," thought Max; "suppose I consult two of my friends." And among his sixty or eighty acquaintances he chose a couple to whom he explained his situation without reserve.

"What a peculiar idea!" exclaimed Count Léon de Chaussey. "Marry a work-girl! Why it's worthy of a troubadour."

"I could understand a man making her his mistress," opined Julien de Voël.

"But even that—"

"Yes, yes, remember she is very pretty."

"But now she has ran off with some one else."

"That was a great mistake on her part, for she has lost the chance Max offered her of becoming his wife."

"Well, no doubt she had fine hopes, but after all they were hopes and nothing more. She probably preferred ready cash. You know the proverb 'a bird in the hand?'"

"But I offered her jewellery and cashmeres, for a value of several thousand francs," objected Max, "and she refused the gift."

"Then some one has made her a better offer—twice as valuable as yours."

This talk annoyed the viscount, for despite appearances he could not bring himself to believe that Louise had really played him false. "Well, gentlemen," said he, "all this doesn't tell me what you would do if you were in my place."

"For myself," said Léon de Chaussey, "I should begin by marrying Henriette."

"And I," said the Baron de Voël, "I should refuse to have anything to do with that sour-tempered heiress."

"I should marry her," pleaded Chaussey, "because she has an income of two hundred thousand francs—which would suffice to season the least appetizing dish. Afterwards, what could prevent Max from finding out that virtuous, lovely work-girl's address? He would have all the sinews of war requisite to carry her off from her seducer."

"Well," rejoined M. Julien de Voël, "I should refuse to marry Henriette for, firstly, Max is rich enough as regards his own expectations, and has no need to marry for money. Secondly, he is still too young to tie a rope round his neck. And thirdly, he ought to show that he has some little will of his own, and is not a child in leading strings."

"Very good," observed Max. "But which advice ought I to follow?"

"Why, mine of course," answered de Chaussey.

"No, mine," retorted Julien de Voël.

"Well, let us refresh ourselves," said the viscount, and scarcely content with the assistance of his friends he sought for inspiration in the flowing bowl.

At length his advisers withdrew. "Make haste and marry Henriette," urged Léon. "No, no, refuse her hand," pleaded Julien.

"Dear me," thought Max, "I am no further advanced than before. I ought to have consulted three friends instead of two, and then there would have been a majority one way or the other."

"Ah! ah!" laughed the two augurs as they strolled home. "Really Max is a singular fellow. So that was the reason of his disappearance. He was in love."

"In my idea his faculties are giving way. He's far from being up to the mark."

"That's my opinion also. And yet he used to be a strong-minded fellow. I recollect that he was a true sceptic when he was spending his mother's fortune. The change is certainly singular."

"Ah! age, my dear boy, old age."

"And then his father is somewhat to blame."

"No, no, his faculties are failing him. Fancy, he refuses two hundred thousand francs a year?"

Max had begged his friends to keep their conversation secret, but on the morrow all his acquaintances had been informed of his singular ideas, which, in the world of Parisian *viveurs*, naturally provoked no little merriment. Some choice spirits even engaged in bets, and one young fellow was so bold as to lay two to one, that Max would be fool enough not to marry Mademoiselle Henriette after all.

However, time passed by, and the viscount was still as irresolute as ever. The date fixed for his decision arrived, and he was obliged to ask for a short delay, which the Count de Tressang readily granted, being well acquainted with his son's character, and realising that gentle means would best conduce to success. Moreover, there seemed nothing to fear, for Max was a constant visitor at the house of Madame de Chevonceux.

"I must forget my dream," he would say to himself at times, "I must bid good-bye to my plans and hopes. I thought I might have lived in happiness, that I might be loved, but fate has decided otherwise." Then thoughts of Louise returned to him, and filled his heart with sadness.

He was not acquainted with the arrangements made by his father and the Marchioness de Chevonceux, arrangements which resembled so much bargaining on either side, the old lady being anxious to retain a large slice of her daughter's fortune, and the count wishing to secure to his son almost the whole of the heiress's property; and yet he instinctively revolted at the idea of becoming Mademoiselle Henriette's husband.

"If I only knew what had become of Louise," he thought; "if I were not tortured by these frightful doubts, by this incessant worry, my misfortune would be less painful to bear. I might say to myself 'everything is over, let me endeavour to forget;' but I really know nothing, nothing."

"What a hypocrite I am," he would say to himself at another time. "I am trying to conceal my baseness and cowardice; and yet I am no better than the rest of them. The idea of Henriette's large fortune tempts me." Even at that moment, however, the voice of conscience seemed to murmur: "No, I wrong myself. After all I should have preferred Louise's love."

VIII.

MAX'S CHOICE.

It was a dark, unhealthy chamber on the fourth floor in the Rue Sainte-Foy. The window opening on to what was called a courtyard, in truth a fetid well, served to admit but a pale ray of light, and an abundance of pestilential stench. The furniture had reached the last stage of decay. The facings of the wooden bedstead had crumbled away; the seaweed mattresses, in their torn tickings, were well nigh as hard as the tiled floor. The chest of drawers was propped up by means of sundry bricks; the rush-seated chairs were positively rotten; and the arm-chair, covered with shreds of various hues, was stained and grimed with filth. Over the mantle-shelf hung a dirty little looking-glass with the quick,

silver half worn away. And yet this was Louise's abode. For more than a month she had lain in bed weeping and suffering. Fever had swollen her features, and left its marks on her once white skin. Her distended eyes had a fixed, mournful look of despair.

A portly woman, with a low, brutal expression of countenance, and a shambling gait, suddenly opened the door ; at the sight of her Louise perceptibly winced. "Well, my girl," exclaimed this woman in a hoarse guttural voice, "have you made up your mind?"

"Oh! madame," pleaded the unfortunate girl, "I suffer so."

"Then all the more reason. You'll be better cared for in a hospital than in a lodging-house; and, besides, a sick person's a nuisance. My sheets and mattresses will soon be spoiled with you lying always in bed. The last fortnight you paid for will be up to-morrow. Have you any money? for there is none left in the little box."

"What, none at all?"

"Well, when I say none, there are perhaps three or four francs, but that's all."

"But, madame, if I recollect rightly, there were still forty francs less than a week ago."

"A week ago, I daresay there were; but illnesses are expensive matters, you know."

"But what have I taken then?"

"Eh? What do you say? What have you taken?"

"Yes, it seems to me that the infusions and the little broth I drink can't cost very dear."

"So I've been robbing you, eh? Is that what you mean, you little hussy?" cried the fat woman. "I rob you! That's my reward for nursing you! I rob you! Well, if such is the case, just jump up and dress yourself, and clear out. Clear out, I say! I won't have you here. Either get up or give me some money."

"Oh, madame, pray—" murmured Louise.

"No, no, the money first; after that I'll see. And first of all, I must have nine francs for the next fortnight's rent."

"Oh, you shall be paid, madame."

"And when, pray!"

"To-morrow—when I am able to get out. I have some money put by?"

"Where is it, then?"

"At the savings bank."

"Really?" asked the fat woman with such a look of fiendish cupidity, that Louise felt positively frightened. "And where is your bank book, then?"

"I have not got it here."

"Not got it here? A pretty story indeed!" cried the infuriated crone. "Trying to deceive me, eh? Come, come, I'm not to be imposed upon; so just get up and take yourself off." So saying, she caught Louise by the shoulders as if to force her out of bed.

At this moment an inspiration came to the poor girl. "I have a relative who is well off," said she. "Take him a note from me, and he will come." Then with a trembling hand she wrote a few words to Clodomir.

Half an hour afterwards the bohemian was by her bedside. On finding the girl he had loved in this distressing situation, he burst into tears.

"And Max," said he, when after a moment he somewhat regained possession of himself, "and Max, has he abandoned you then? Oh, if that be the case—"

"No, Max has not abandoned me. In fact, he has no doubt been seeking for me. I fled without his knowing it."

"But why did you do so?"

Louise then had to relate the circumstances of her last interview with the young viscount, and inform Clodomir of the Count de Tressang's letter, and the resolution it had induced her to take. For a month she had remained alone, without friends or assistance, often without a drop of water to quench her thirst, and at the mercy of a woman who terrified her and robbed her.

"However, I had confidence in you," she said at last. "At the hour of danger, I remembered your parting words, and the address you left with me. But not a word to Max—promise it, swear it."

Clodomir promised all she asked of him. "You cannot remain here," he added. "Let me go and speak to the landlady. I will soon be back."

That same evening Louise was comfortably installed in a clean little room near the outer boulevards with a trustworthy nurse at her bedside. Clodomir made all necessary arrangements and then took his leave, promising to call again on the following morning.

On reaching the street he hailed a cab, and bade the Jehu drive him to the Count de Tressang's residence. "Viscount Max?" he asked of the servant who received him in the vestibule.

"'Monsieur le Vicomte' has gone out and will perhaps only return home late," answered the valet. It was then nine o'clock at night.

"What a misfortune!" exclaimed Clodomir. "It is absolutely necessary that I should see him; so I had better wait."

On hearing this the servant, who had recognised the bohemian as one of the viscount's friends, at once showed him to a room where he might wait at leisure.

It so happened that on this same day, Madame de Chevonceux was giving a grand dinner followed by a ball. Several of the guests who had scented the projected marriage of Max and Henriette were delighted with their penetration, and went from group to group announcing that the dinner and the ball simply constituted a betrothal entertainment. At last two o'clock in the morning struck. The cotillon had been danced; flute, violin, and bassoon were silenced, and saltatory couples no longer glided through the vast ball-room. At the card tables a few inveterate gamblers were finishing the last deal, but otherwise most of the guests had departed.

Viscount Max and his father now approached to take their leave of Madame and Mademoiselle de Chevonceux. Henriette was radiant; and gave Max a tender glance as she offered him her hand. But just as the viscount was bending low to kiss the proffered hand, there came to him such an acute remembrance of Louise, that he had not the courage to consummate the profanation. He let Henriette's hand fall and, bowing coldly, turned aside, indignant with himself for his irresolu-

tion and cowardice. The Count de Tressang, at that moment speaking with the marchioness, failed to note this little incident. As the carriage was rolling home, Max communed with himself. "What!" thought he, "must I marry that tall ugly girl, simply because she's rich and I'm poor. The more I see her the more I dislike her; she would simply buy me like one buys a slave. And don't I love elsewhere, don't I love poor Louise, whom my love has perhaps ruined, whose evil genius I was, so to say. No, no, I cannot marry Henriette. I don't know what occasioned Louise's flight, but her motive must have been an honourable one. She loved me, I am sure of it. I will seek for her, better than I have done till now; and when I have found her again she shall be my wife. It is time, since matters are now so advanced as regards Mademoiselle de Chevonceux, that a rupture is sure to cause a perfect scandal. But I cannot lead this frightful life any longer, and to-morrow, yes, to-morrow, I will end it at any cost."

He was in this frame of mind as he alighted from the carriage. In the vestibule a servant informed him that a gentleman had been waiting to speak with him ever since nine o'clock. "Where is he?" asked Max.

"In the smoking-room, monsieur le vicomte."

At sight of Clodomir, our hero guessed a portion of the truth. "Where is Louise?" he asked eagerly.

"She is very ill," replied Clodomir.

"But where is she, where?"

In reply, the bohemian related what he had seen and what he had done.

"You have a noble heart, Clodomir," said Max, pressing his friend's hand. "As for myself, I am but a coward. Still everything may yet be repaired."

"What do you intend to do?"

"You shall soon know. Wait for me here, it will not take me long." With these words Max hastened to his father's room.

"The Count de Tressang, before retiring to rest, was intent on combining an affair which would yield a handsome profit, and disturbed in the midst of his calculations, he looked up with an air of annoyance when his son entered the apartment.

"Father," said the viscount in a firm voice, despite his emotion, "father, I have deceived you. I cannot become Mademoiselle de Chevonceux's husband."

"Monsieur," replied the count, turning livid with rage, "it is now too late to withdraw. You are engaged, and you must marry Mademoiselle Henriette."

"It's impossible, father."

"Take care," said the count. "Take care. Don't you know that I can shatter you like a glass if you refuse to obey me?"

"Believe me, father, it is not without deep regret that I frustrate all your plans for the future; but honour requires—and indeed I owe it to myself—that I should marry the woman I love, and no matter what may happen, I mean to marry her."

"And who is this woman?"

"A young girl who is both beautiful and virtuous."

"Her name, her name?"

"You do not know her, father; she is—she is a—work-girl."

"Louise Blain?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Max indignantly. "So you know her?"

"Yes, I know her."

"Then it was you, father, you who—"

The count waved his hand imperiously, and without paying heed to Max's unfinished question, asked in his turn: "So you think of marrying your mistress?"

"I swear to you, father—"

"That's enough!" exclaimed the count, who could no longer contain his swelling anger. "You have decided not to obey me?"

"Believe me, father—"

"Then take yourself off, sir; leave my house! I dismiss you, I disown you. You are no longer my son! You are ruined, you have nothing left—do you hear me?—nothing! And don't count on anything from me! Live as it pleases you; but above everything forget that your father is the Count de Tressang. Have you reflected? Are you decided?"

"Yes, I am decided, father."

"Then leave the house at once!" cried the count with a threatening gesture.

Max bowed, and retired from the room.

One hour later he left the family mansion accompanied by Clodomir, and taking everything he had a claim to, away with him. His valet packed his trunks as if he were starting on a journey. The servants were generally ignorant of the scene which had taken place between the father and the son; and on the following morning, the count explained Max's departure by remarking that he had gone to the family estates in Burgundy. This news was repeated "below stairs" by M. de Tressang's valet de chambre, and during a few days was generally accepted as correct. But servants are by nature inquisitive, anxious to discover what their masters hide, and prone to doubt what is told them. Fellow footmen compare notes, the cook and the coachman exchange remarks, and the general tittle tattle of the servants' hall often inspires a sagacious menial with an accurate guess as to what has really occurred in madame's boudoir or in master's study. In the present instance various strange circumstances were brought together. Clodomir's visit; his air of mysterious concern, and his pertinacity in waiting for the viscount till half-past two in the morning. A woman's name, overheard by the viscount's valet, who, instead of accompanying his master, had received orders to remain in Paris. The fact that the viscount had gone off at such a strange hour with his friend and his boxes in a cab, without waiting for the morning mail, and driving to the railway station in one of the carriages. Moreover, as the butler was going up to bed, he had fancied he heard the count and the viscount exchanging angry words in the former's room. All these little circumstances put together, told a very strange story indeed. Half the truth was known and the remainder guessed. From house to house did the rumour of Max's flight spread, until, at last, it reached the ears of Henriette. She had been surprised by Max's cold leave-taking on the occasion of their last meeting, and his subsequent prolonged absence had seemed very singular. On learning the truth, or at any rate such of it as was known, she flew into a violent

passion, wreaking most of her anger on the unfortunate marchioness. From anger Henriette passed to grief, indeed, to such bitter despair, that all her enemies were elated. At any other moment Mademoiselle de Chevonceux would have tried to conceal her feelings, conscious that her foes were legion, and anxious not to afford them any subject for rejoicing. Moreover, she ordinarily strove to avoid ridicule; but now she cared little whether she were ridiculous or not. For the first time in her life the great heiress knew the meaning of misfortune, and it seemed to her that death alone could relieve her from her sufferings. Indeed, she had serious thoughts of taking the veil and ending her life in a convent. As for the marchioness, she received no one; the door-keeper having strict instructions to meet every inquiry with the answer, that the ladies were not at home.

In the meanwhile the Count de Tressang asked himself, "Well, what will my son do? Marry that girl? No, really, he can't seriously think of any such folly! What can he hope for? Misery will soon bring him back to me. Come, how long can I give him? Let us say two months to grow tired of his mistress, two more to exhaust his last resources, and a final one to conquer his self-esteem—in all, five months. Mademoiselle Henriette is a sensible young woman. She will certainly learn to be patient. Max is not lost to her yet; and the difficulties in the way will give an additional charm to the conquest."

Imbued with this last idea, the Count de Tressang at once made up his mind. "Come," said he, "I mustn't lose my head. All the responsibility devolves on me. Max has taken himself off; Mademoiselle de Chevonceux is in despair; and I'll be bound that the old marchioness has well nigh lost her senses. All that means so much work for me, and I must set about my task at once."

Accordingly, he hastened to call on Madame de Chevonceux, whose door, albeit forbidden to everyone else, was thrown wide open at his approach. Henriette was particularly glad to see him. "At last," thought she, "I shall know the truth."

Her surmise was tolerably correct, for the count made a clean breast of almost everything; still, at the same time, he took it upon himself to revive Henriette's hopes. "Max is certain to come back," said he, "for he is ruined. Pity him, mademoiselle, but do not deny him your affection. You will see him repentant at your feet."

Encouraged by these words, Henriette cast aside her despair, and once more indulged in hopes for the future.

Louise, on her side, was rapidly returning to health after her cruel trials. And in reality, is not happiness the best physician? Max had disposed of such resources as he still possessed to purchase the necessary furniture for a modest household, and assisted by Clodomir, who still took a tender interest in the woman he had once loved, whom he had wished to make his wife, the viscount was able to obtain fairly decent goods for a comparatively small outlay.

In a few days everything was ready, and Louise was installed in her new abode in the neighbourhood of the Rue de Fleurus. Pending their marriage, Max rented a small furnished room a short distance off. "I will endeavour to obtain some employment to permit us to live," said he to Clodomir, "and as soon as I have found it we will be married."

"Don't let that delay you," replied his friend. "There is nothing to prevent you from looking out for employment while you fulfil the preliminary formalities required for your marriage. And besides, remember this, as soon as you *are* married your father's anger will give way. I feel certain of it, so make haste."

Max followed this advice, and three days later the Count de Tressang, who had formally refused his consent to his son's marriage with Louise, received a first respectful summons.* At the first word of the act read to him by the notary, the count flew into a violent passion. "Never," cried he. "Never! I'll prevent that marriage!" and as the notary explained to him that nothing in the world could prevent Max from exercising his undoubted rights, for he was of age, and a French citizen to boot, the count, like a great lord that he was, threatened to kick the legal functionary out of his house.

But in a few curt words the notary explained to M. de Tressang that although he was, no doubt, a very wealthy and very great nobleman, the law would punish such violence in the most exemplary fashion; whereupon the count, reduced to vent his rage on inanimate objects, smashed a quantity of costly bric-à-brac which he had collected after great research and trouble.

"And to think," said he, as soon as the notary had retired, "to think that we have no longer any Bastille, no longer any For-l'Evêque, no more *lettres-de-cachet*! Ah! in the old days I could have easily shut up my son, and sent that hussy to rot in some dark dungeon! Oh! the revolution! The revolution! It has robbed us noblemen of everything!" And utterly crushed by the consciousness of his helplessness, he sank into an arm-chair.

A second summons followed the first one, and albeit that the count still protested, a third and last one came. Finally, Max sent all his friends the following circular note:—

"The Viscount Gustave Adolphe Maxime de Tressang has the honour to inform you of his marriage with Mademoiselle Louise Blain."

The wedding took place at the church of Saint Etienne du Mont at six o'clock in the morning. Two of Max's former friends served as witnesses, for Clodomir had his reasons not to attend. That same day an attack of apoplexy almost killed the Count de Tressang. Max's boldness and disdain for what others might think, saved his reputation. His marriage caused a great stir, well nigh a scandal, but at least he did not seem ridiculous.

"Mother," said Henriette to the Marchioness de Chevonceaux, "the Tressangs are scoundrels; they have both deceived us. I must have my revenge."

Fortunately, the marchioness succeeded in proving to her daughter that any additional scandal would entirely destroy her reputation.

* In France a young man under five-and-twenty cannot marry without the paternal consent; but, if above that age, he may do so, providing that, at stated intervals, he formally signifies his intention in three successive legal acts drawn up by a notary, and entitled *sommations respectueuses*. These *sommations* are imperative as long as the intending bridegroom is under forty years of age; or unless he has been previously married, in which case the formality is dispensed with. Should his father and mother both be dead, the *sommations* must be sent to his grand-parents, or to his guardian if he be legally provided with one.—[Trans.]

"After all, mother, I cannot be angry with Max," said Henriette. "All this could not have happened if the count, his father, had acted frankly and told us the plain truth. I always felt that Max would never love me. What can be done now? Nothing; and yet, mother, if I had been his wife he would have been happy; at least, I think so, for he would have mastered me."

Shortly afterwards, Madame de Chevenceux and her daughter left Paris for Germany, where some of the marchioness's relatives resided. Henriette had preferred this journey to the convent where she had, at first, thought of retiring.

IX.

CLOUDS AND SUNSHINE.

DESPITE Louise's economy, the resources of the young couple gradually came to an end. Max had not been able to obtain the employment he hoped for. Now-a-days, indeed, young men belonging to what is called society, are so educated that they know nothing they might turn to use at any given moment. Max, who was supposed to have been admirably schooled—Max, who in the most critical society in the world had, despite all his youthful freaks, been looked upon as an accomplished nobleman, almost as a wit—Max who had been an embassy *attaché* (for a brief period it is true), but who sooner or later, thanks to the family influence, would certainly have become an ambassador, now found himself unable to earn 1,200 francs a year.

Casting his pride on one side, he had gone in all directions humbly asking that his courage and intelligence might be utilised, but everywhere he had encountered discouraging refusals. For a brief period he had one scanty resource, that of copying documents for a solicitor, but even this all but unremunerated work came to an end. By degrees, all disposable objects in the little household were turned to account—sold or carried to the pawnbrokers. For instance, a few silver spoons and forks purchased prior to the wedding; then such little jewellery as he and Louise possessed. Little by little, bit by bit, everything followed the same road—the books, the linen, and the clothes.

Max then learnt to know what misery was; not that careless misery which we elbow every day, misery which travels through life in the open sunlight, with head erect and smiling lips, careless and almost content, accepting things as they come, and taking no pains to hide its nakedness; but that decent reserved misery which trembles with very shame and tries to conceal itself. The misery of "shabby gentility," arrayed in a dress coat, and a white choker, spending threepence for dinner, shivering at winter-tide in a bare fireless room; but wearing gloves and ever striving to conceal the truth—in one word, the most horrible misery in the world, starving and yet complaining of indigestion, a slave to the proprieties and decorum.

One day the very last napoleon was changed, and soon afterwards there was not even any bread in the house. There was nothing left to sell or pawn; for the landlord, mindful of his rent, would not allow any

article of furniture to be removed. So there was no resource, and no more bread.

Max was in despair ; but at last summoning his courage, he went out in search of Clodomir. "Have you any money, my poor friend?" said he to the bohemian.

"Yes, fortunately I have," replied the latter. "Here is my purse. But better still, I have found a situation for you."

"Indeed! Is it certain? What kind of situation is it?"

"Oh, it's certain enough, but perhaps it won't suit you."

"But anything would suit me, my dear fellow."

"Well, it's a situation as clerk in a parcels' delivery concern."

"And how much shall I earn?"

"Fifteen hundred francs a year."

"How indebted I am to you, Clodomir! When ought I to go there?"

"You can begin your duties to-morrow. You are warmly recommended by a friend of mine, your situation has been fully explained, and you can receive a small sum in advance. You will have to deal with very worthy people."

Max took down the address, and having provided himself with a napoleon from Clodomir's purse—for there were urgent necessities which could not wait until the morrow—exclaimed, "Good-bye, my friend, and thanks. Louise must be getting anxious. I will see you again to-morrow."

Louise was quite joyful at the good news; and when Max opined that after all, fifteen hundred francs a year was very little, she rejoined: "But no, dear, with what I can earn we shall almost be rich. For I mean to begin working again. I am determined on it."

"As you will, my good Louise. We will both of us work, then."

"Yes, and we shall be able to economise for our country house. Don't you remember that charming house you spoke about on the banks of the Loire?"

* * * * *

Max had been at work for five months, and happiness and contentment had returned to his abode. One day the Count de Tressang heard that his only son, his heir, the future representative of the noble house of Tressang, was earning his living as somebody's clerk. At this news his pride was disturbed, and more still, he felt that paternal love still lingered in his heart. At last he could contain himself no longer, and so, one morning, he betook himself to the little apartment in the Rue de Fleurus. Everything was beautifully bright and clean, and even tasteful, despite its simplicity. A springtide sun ray darted through the spotless curtains. Near the window stood a little *jardinière* replete with flowers. In a large bird cage the cherished linnet disported himself in the society of three companions. Louise was singing. The door stood open.

The count paused on the threshold as if he were dazed or fascinated, and looked at Louise, to whose beauty, happiness seemed to have leant an additional attraction. A feeling of remorse came over the old nobleman, and his heart, which care and ambition had hardened, seemed to soften once more. There was a touch of emotion in his voice as he asked if M. Max de Tressang were at home.

"My husband is at his office," replied Louise, who had no notion who this visitor might be.

"Then, madame, he must be fetched for a very urgent matter."

"But his master is very exacting, monsieur."

"His master," repeated the count with an effort, which showed how little he liked the term as applied to his son. "His master will make no objection. It is necessary he should come at once; so I must beg you to give me his address, in order that I may send for him."

"It is a long way off, monsieur, at La Villette."

"And does he go there every day?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"On foot?"

"Why, yes, monsieur;" and Louise began to laugh.

The count felt so embarrassed that he did not venture to make any rejoinder.

"It is true that it's a long way off," resumed Louise, "but my husband says that the exercise does him good, and besides, we might not find such a convenient lodging elsewhere for the same rental."

Having noted Max's address the count went downstairs, sent for a commissionaire, and gave him his instructions. Then he hastily returned to the little sitting-room, for he wished to turn his son's absence to profit.

"And you are happy, madame?" he asked, as he sat down near Louise.

"Yes, monsieur, we are happy," she simply replied. "And young, and loving each other, and having nothing to wish for—"

"What! Nothing to wish for? Nothing?"

"Nothing, monsieur."

"Not even wealth? For I believe that M. de Tressang was formerly wealthy."

"He no longer remembers. He only regrets, or I should say, we only regret one thing, that our marriage should have grieved his father."

The count no longer dared to speak, for he was afraid of betraying himself.

At last Max arrived. "My son," said his father, taking him by the hand, "your apartment is ready at home. I came to fetch you and your charming wife. You must forgive your father, he did not know where to find happiness again."

* * * * *

Ten years or more have passed since then. Max and Louise are still supremely happy. The count seems to have grown younger with his advancing years.

Clodomir, who has become famous under a name not recorded in these pages, told me this story last summer. We were on the banks of the Loire, lying in the shade of the old willows, which dip their branches in the stream. Midway up the slope behind us rose a charming house, half hidden by foliage and flowers.

Louise and Max had realised their dream.

MISSING!

I.

ONE Sunday afternoon, not long ago, the whole district of the Marais—that busy quarter of Paris which now-a-days is but one vast workshop from the Temple to the Rue Saint Antoine, from the Bastille to the Rue Turbigo—was in a state of most unwonted excitement. Bustling as it may be on week-days, when all the bronze factories re-echo to the sound of toil, when the heavy vans roll over the pavement from druggist's to toy-dealer's, taking at each halt some fresh consignment for despatch by rail, when work-people and customers crowd the thousand and one establishments where every description of "*article de Paris*" is produced for a value of many millions of francs per annum—on Sundays, at least, the Marais usually relapses into silence. Were it not for the multitudinous inscriptions which cover all the houses from garret to basement chronicling the names of manufacturers, dealers and commission agents, one might fancy oneself in the old times, when the Marais was inhabited solely by the *rentier* class, by worthy old couples retired from business on fairly decent incomes, or by relics of the ancient nobility, scarcely wealthy enough to reside in the Faubourg St. Germain. Such, indeed, was the Marais fifty years ago—a quiet and secluded district—and thus have Honoré de Balzac and Paul de Kock described it in their novels. But, now-a-days, it is a vast hive of industry, whence peace and quiet are utterly banished during the six days set apart for toil. It is only on the Sabbath, when workshops and store-rooms are closed, when the week-day toilers are making merry in their native Belleville, or chinking glasses in the *bosquets* of Montreuil, that it regains a semblance of its old tranquillity.

And yet, on the particular Sunday we have mentioned, the usual "Sabbath-hush" was wanting. True enough, no heavily laden vans were rolling through the narrow streets; no din of hammers and anvils came from the closed *ateliers*. The foot-ways were not bestrewn with packing cases, and no crowd of commissionnaires and receivers, clerks and commercial travellers, hurried hither and thither peripatetically proving the truth of the axiom that "Time is money." But then, there were unusually animated groups of customers in all the wine shops, unwonted knots of people at the street corners, gatherings of housewives in front of the fruiterers' stores, and conclaves of door-keepers and kindred scandal-mongers in every convenient alley.

Something very extraordinary must have happened, as passers-by correctly opined. The fact is, that one of the most honourable manufacturers of the Rue du Roi de Sicile had disappeared, and all efforts to find him had so far proved unsuccessful. The grocer at the corner of the Rue St. Louis possessed full information on the subject—information obtained first hand from the cook of the missing gentleman—and his shop was most extensively patronised that afternoon, even by people who pretended that he mixed dust with his pepper, and sweetened his jam with glucose. For once in a way, they put up with his adulterations to enjoy the benefit of his conversation. "It was yesterday evening," repeated the worthy grocer over and over again, as he assisted in weighing pounds of sugar and penn'orths of salt, "yesterday evening just after dinner, our neighbour M. Jandidier went down to his cellar to get up a bottle of old wine, and since then no one has seen him. The cellar door was found wide open, but M. Jandidier had disappeared, vanished, evaporated !"

From time to time it happens that mysterious disappearances are spoken of. Alarm is spread in various directions, and prudent people invest money in sword sticks and revolvers. But as a rule the police shrug their shoulders when these occurrences are mentioned. They are acquainted with the "seamy side" of the cunningly embroidered canvas. They start an investigation and discover the truth, so different to popular exaggeration : in lieu of a romance, they come upon some sad story.

However, to a certain extent the grocer of the Rue Saint Louis spoke the truth. It was a fact that M. Jandidier, who did a most extensive business as a manufacturer of imitation jewellery, had altogether disappeared since the previous night.

M. Théodore Jandidier was some fifty-eight years old. He was very tall and very bald, gifted with fairly good manners and deportment, and according to popular report, possessed of a very considerable fortune. This was not to be wondered at, for in Paris the trade in imitation jewellery is simply enormous, and some manufacturers like the Bourguignons and others, whose creations are exported all over the world, are simply millionaires. One could not say as much concerning M. Jandidier, but he was, nevertheless, a man of means. A pretty little collection of scrip and bonds were said to yield him an income of twenty thousand francs a year, and his business brought him an average annual profit of another fifty thousand. He was esteemed and liked in the neighbourhood, for his probity was above all question, and his morals perfectly exemplary. When five-and-thirty, he had married a portionless cousin, who had proved a happy and faithful wife.

This worthy couple possessed an only daughter named Thérèse, who was literally idolised by her father. At one time it had been said that she was to marry M. Gustave Schmidt, the eldest son of the senior partner in the great banking house of Schmidt, Gubenheim, and Worb, but somehow or other—no one knew why—the marriage had been broken off ; and this had caused all the more surprise, as the young folks were apparently very much in love with each other.

Some friends of the Jandidier family pretended that old Schmidt, the father, the most avaricious of all our Parisian financiers, and an in-

veterate "fleece," had required that Mademoiselle Thérèse should bring her husband a preposterously large dowry, such as her father could not possibly furnish despite his comparative wealth. However, this was only a rumour which nothing had so far authenticated.

On this Sunday afternoon, when the news of M. Jandidier's disappearance spread through the Marais, all the incidents of his past life which the gossips were acquainted with, were duly recorded and submitted to public appreciation. A hundred stories of his honesty and good nature were told. He had been an honour to the district, an excellent worthy man in every respect. Given his rigid morals, it was altogether impossible to imagine that he had "gone off on the loose." His family ties were too strong for him to have abandoned his wife and daughter. No, he must have fallen a victim to some base scoundrel—he must have received a foul blow; and the honour of the Marais required that his remains should be recovered and fittingly interred, and that his murderer should be brought to justice.

So thus, during that Sunday afternoon, the rumours flew through the district, spreading in every ear and growing on every tongue, till, at last, having learned the reports from his agents, the district commissary of police considered it his duty to repair to the missing gentleman's residence with the view of obtaining precise information.

He was ushered into the grand drawing-room which was in a state of semi-obscure, the shutters being half closed and the curtains drawn. Both Madame Jandidier and her daughter were distracted with grief, and he had considerable difficulty in calming them and inducing them to answer his questions. However, he was at length placed in possession of these particulars.

On the previous evening (Saturday) M. Jandidier had dined as usual with his family. He had made, however, but a poor meal, for he was troubled with a bad headache. After dinner he had gone down stairs—not to the wine cellar as the grocer of the Rue Saint Louis pretended—but to his warehouse, where a couple of *employés* were still at work. Having given them some orders, he retired for a short time into his private-room, occupied himself, no doubt, with various business matters, and then came up stairs again and told his wife that he was going out for a stroll. From that stroll he had never returned.

The commissary of police carefully noted down these particulars, and then asked Madame Jandidier if he could not speak with her alone for a few minutes. She looked at him with some surprise but finally signified her assent, and Mademoiselle Thérèse discreetly left the room.

"You must excuse the question I am about to ask you, madame," exclaimed the commissary, as the young lady closed the door behind her. "But this is a serious affair, and if we, the officials of justice, are to clear up the mystery, we must know the whole truth. Excuse my indiscretion, I beg you, but can you tell me whether M. Jandidier, your husband, ever had—to your knowledge—what shall I say? Well, any passing fancy, any feminine acquaintance away from home?"

Madame Jandidier sprang to her feet as if impelled by a spring. Anger had dried her tears, and it was in a snappish voice that she answered, "I have been married three-and-twenty years, monsieur. Never on any one occasion has my husband given cause for such a sup-

position. If I was not with him of an evening, he never returned home later than ten o'clock."

"Well, madame, was your husband in the habit of frequenting any club?" asked the commissary. "Had he any special café where he met his friends?"

"I should not have allowed such habits," curtly replied the lady.

"Do you know if he was accustomed to carry large sums about his person, madame?"

"On that point I can give you no information. I have always attended to my household, and not to my husband's business affairs."

The commissary found it impossible to obtain any further information, for the worthy dame's grief was now blended with a strong admixture of anger and resentment. The supposition that her husband might have a mistress revolted her feelings as a wife, and the barely veiled insinuation that he might frequent a club, and no doubt gamble there, incensed her as an attack on his recognised probity and integrity. However, despite Madame Jandidier's stiff air, the commissary thought it only right to try and assuage her affliction by repeating a few hackneyed "compliments of condolence," and then, with a profound bow, he retired.

Before leaving the house, however, he considered it his duty to question the servants, and their statements which generally corroborated Madame Jandidier's, made him feel somewhat anxious. He began to think that a crime had really been committed.

A few hours later he sent his report to the Prefecture of Police, and the same evening the case was submitted to the consideration of the Public Prosecutor. The latter, in his turn, delegated an investigating magistrate to examine the affair, and on the Monday morning the famous detective Retiveau, better known in the Rue de Jérusalem by his nickname of "Maître Magloire," received orders to scour Paris, and if needs be, the provinces, in search of M. Jandidier—or his corpse. A capital photograph of the manufacturer, taken only a short time previously, was handed to the detective, who at once commenced his difficult task.

II.

MAÎTRE MAGLOIRE was a man of no little energy, and a fervent believer in the value of time. His alacrity was proverbial, so that the investigating magistrate, intrusted with the Jandidier affair, was by no means surprised when, on the Monday afternoon, his usher announced that the detective wished to speak with him, having already obtained some important information.

The magistrate at once gave orders for the police agent to be admitted. "Here already, M. Magloire," said he. "So you have fresh news, eh?"

"I am on the scent, monsieur."

"Well, tell me what you have ascertained."

"To begin, monsieur, I have learned that M. Jandidier did not leave home at half-past six on Saturday evening, but at seven o'clock precisely."

"Precisely?"

"Well, yes. My information comes from a clock-maker, in the immediate neighbourhood of M. Jandidier's house. This clock-maker knew him well, and noticed that he paused in front of his shop. In fact, M. Jandidier pulled out his watch and compared time with the clock above the door. The circumstance induced the clock-maker to look at the time himself, and he recollects perfectly well that it was then exactly two minutes past seven. Those two minutes would have amply sufficed for M. Jandidier to walk from his house as far as this shop. It is fortunate that he should have paused to compare time, for this apparently trivial circumstance has guided me to all my subsequent discoveries. For instance, the clock-maker noticed that M. Jandidier was munching an unlighted cigar. It occurred to me that he must ultimately have lighted it, and I asked myself where and how? Had he a box of lucifers in his pocket? No; for I learned at his house that a little silver-plated box he usually carried about with him, had been found on the mantel-shelf in his room since his disappearance. In this case, I reasoned, he must probably have gone into some tobacconist's shop to get a light."

"Yes, no doubt," opined the magistrate.

"I had considerable difficulty in finding the shop in question," resumed the detective; "but as the course taken by M. Jandidier from his residence to the clock-maker's shop seemed to indicate that he was going towards the boulevards, I went in that direction. To my delight, just as I reached the Boulevard du Temple, sure enough I came upon a tobacconist's shop. I went in and made inquiries. The woman behind the counter was well acquainted with M. Jandidier, and she recollects perfectly that he came in on Saturday evening to get a light. She was all the more certain on the point for, at the same time, he purchased a packet of *londrès extra*, which greatly surprised her, as he usually smoked very cheap cigars."

"How did he seem?"

"The woman told me that he looked pre-occupied. I obtained from her an important piece of information, which shows that Madame Jandidier was altogether wrong when she told the commissary of police that her husband did not go to any particular café. However, husbands don't always tell everything to their wives; and according to the tobacconist, M. Jandidier frequently went to the Café Turc, which is hard-by. I went there and questioned the waiters. Two of them remembered having seen him on Saturday evening. He drank two small glasses of brandy neat, and talked with some friends who were there. He seemed sad. The waiter who served at his table told me that he and his friends talked all the while about life insurances. It was half-past eight when he went away, accompanied by one of his friends, M. Blandureau, a merchant of the neighbourhood. I immediately went to M. Blandureau's warehouse and questioned him. He told me that on Saturday evening he walked down the boulevards with M. Jandidier, as far as the corner of the Rue de Richelieu, where M. Jandidier left him, saying that he had business to attend to. He was not at all in his usual frame of mind, M. Blandureau tells me; he seemed out of sorts and worried with melancholy presentiments."

"Very good, so far," muttered the magistrate.

"On leaving M. Blandureau," continued Maître Magloire, "I returned to the Rue du Roi de Sicile to inquire of the people of the house if M. Jandidier had, to their knowledge, any customers or friends, might be even a mistress, in the Rue de Richelieu. I more particularly questioned the man-servant who generally did his master's errands, but all he could tell me was that M. Jandidier's tailor lived in that street. I thought it, after all, advisable to go and see this tailor. 'Yes,' said he, 'M. Jandidier came to see me on Saturday. He came to order a pair of trousers. It was past nine o'clock.' It seems that whilst he was being measured a button fell from his waistcoat, and he asked the tailor to sew it on again. For this to be done, he took off his coat, and at the same time removed a packet of papers and a note-book from the breast-pocket. Holding these papers in his hand he half sorted them, and the tailor noticed that they comprised several bank notes?"

"Ah! That's a clue. So he had a large sum on his person?"

"Large? Well not so, perhaps, for a man of his position; but still a fair amount. The tailor thinks there must have been twelve or fourteen hundred francs in notes."

"Continue," said the investigating magistrate.

"While the button of his waistcoat was being sewn on again, M. Jandidier suddenly left off sorting his papers and complained of indisposition. The tailor had already noticed that he looked far from well; and at his customer's request he dispatched an apprentice to fetch a cab. M. Jandidier said that he had to go as far as the Halle aux Vins to see one of his work people who lived hard-by. Unfortunately the apprentice could not tell me the number of the cab he fetched, but on the other hand he recollected that it had yellow wheels, and was drawn by a big black horse. The yellow wheels proved that the vehicle did not come from the stables of the Cab Company, but that it belonged to some petty job-master. I sent a circular note to all the authorised cab-keepers, and a few hours ago I had the satisfaction of learning that the vehicle in question was No. 6,007. The driver remembered that on Saturday evening he was hailed by a lad in the Rue de Richelieu, and that for ten minutes or so he waited outside the shop of a tailor named Gouin. I asked him if he would be able to recognise the gentleman he drove to the Halle aux Vins, and he told me that he thought he would. Thereupon, I showed him five photographs, and he at once picked out M. Jandidier's portrait. There was a bright moonlight on Saturday evening, he said, and whilst the gentleman was counting out the money to pay his fare he had a good look at him."

Maître Magloire paused and noted with satisfaction the approbative expression on the magistrate's face.

"Well," said he, "this cabby drove M. Jandidier to the immediate vicinity of the Halle aux Vins, to No. 48, in the Rue d'Arras-Saint-Victor; and in this house there lives a workman, whom M. Jandidier employed, a workman of the name of Jules Tarot."

The significant manner in which Maître Magloire articulated these words "Jules Tarot" was well calculated to impress the investigating magistrate.

"Have you any suspicions?" asked the latter, giving the detective a keen look.

"Not precisely; but still here are the facts. On reaching the Rue d'Arras, M. Jandidier discharged his cab. He asked the doorkeeper if Tarot was at home, and on receiving an affirmative reply he went upstairs. It was then about ten o'clock. Half an hour afterwards the doorkeeper went to bed, and he was just falling asleep when he heard Tarot come down stairs. Tarot called to him to pull the rope which opens the door, and, thanks to the night light, the doorkeeper perceived that the workman was accompanied by the gentleman who had called. They went out together; and shortly after midnight Tarot returned home alone."

"And M. Jandidier?" asked the magistrate.

"Ah! I have been unable to trace him any further," replied Maître Magloire.

"That seems significant; suspicious even."

"Yes, monsieur. I fancy it's a bad job. Of course I could not question Tarot; it would have put him on his guard."

"Have you found out what kind of man this fellow Tarot is?"

"Oh! On that point I questioned the doorkeeper. Tarot, he told me, is a mother-of-pearl worker. He polishes the shells, and is most skilful in imparting the proper nacreous iridescence. Altogether, he seems to be a clever fellow, and he and his wife together—for he has taught her the work—earn at times as much as a hundred francs a week."

"So they are well off, for people of their class."

"Well, no, monsieur. They are both of them young, both of them Parisians born and bred, they have no children, and so they amuse themselves. Not content with Sunday relaxation and pleasure, they habitually make Monday a fête day, after the fashion of so many work-people, and the result is, that long before pay day arrives they are desperately hard up."

"H'm," said the magistrate, stroking his chin with a pensive air. "All this seems very suspicious—very suspicious indeed. So the Tarots lead rather a loose life? Their purse is often empty; and very likely they are in debt. Those twelve hundred francs that M. Jandidier had about him, no doubt, excited their covetousness. He probably called on Tarot to intrust him with some work, and no doubt pulled out his pocket-book to make a memorandum. Tarot must have seen the bank notes. And no trace, you say, can be found of M. Jandidier after he left the house with his workman at eleven o'clock at night?"

"No, monsieur, no trace at all," answered the detective. "I have made diligent inquiries in all directions but without result."

"Very strange, very suspicious," muttered the magistrate; and then in a louder key he added: "I must say, M. Magloire, that you have conducted this inquiry admirably. Guided by M. Jandidier's unlighted cigar, you have traced him to—well, to the man who is probably his murderer. Yes, his murderer, I have very strong suspicions on the point."

A brief pause ensued, and then the magistrate asked: "Was Tarot at home when you made these inquiries this afternoon?"

"Oh, no, monsieur. He and his wife had gone off. It's Monday, remember."

"Are you certain that they had merely gone off holiday-making?"

"Why, yes, monsieur; the doorkeeper said they had left early in the morning with a couple of friends, two of Tarot's comrades, I believe. They were going to picnic near Chaville."

"Ah! That was a splendid opportunity to make a perquisition in their absence, Maître Magloire."

"Certainly, monsieur, but I had no search warrant, and besides, it was only an hour or so ago that I went to the Rue d'Arras."

"I suppose that doorkeeper is to be depended upon?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur. He's affiliated at the Prefecture, No. 920."*

"Then he's safe. Did you leave him any instructions as to what he ought to do, if the Tarots returned home before you saw him again?"

"I did better than that, monsieur, I left a comrade at the house to wait and watch."

"Very good. Well, M. Magloire, we must have a perquisition; and here are a couple of warrants which you can use if occasion requires. Be here at eight o'clock to-morrow morning."

So saying, the magistrate returned to some documents he had been perusing when the detective arrived. The latter pocketed the warrants, made a deep bow, and hastened out of the room.

III.

It was already six o'clock, and before repairing to the Rue d'Arras-Saint-Victor it was necessary that Maître Magloire should call at the office of the district commissary of police, show him his instructions, and request him to preside at the perquisition. As the commissary was away at his dinner, some little time was lost. "We must have a locksmith," the detective reflected, "for the Tarots will hardly have returned, and it will be necessary to force open the door." A locksmith was accordingly procured, a couple of *gardiens de la Paix* were summoned to serve as an escort, and on the commissary's return the party set off.

At the corner of the street the detective asked his companions to wait a moment, and then went ahead. It was necessary that he should reconnoitre the ground, and ascertain from the comrade whom he had left with the doorkeeper if anything noteworthy had occurred during his absence.

As he entered the house he heard heavy steps climbing the stairs, and a man and a woman singing a gay refrain. "Have they returned?" thought Maître Magloire, and he hurried into the doorkeeper's room.

His comrade was there, and on perceiving him raised his fore-finger to his lips: "Hush, they've just come home. They are only halfway up stairs."

"They are singing loud enough," rejoined Maître Magloire in an undertone. "I must say that they are unusually gay for—for murderers."

"Oh!" replied his comrade. "The wine has got into their heads. As for their gaiety we'll see about that by-and-bye."

* It should be remembered that a very large number of Parisian doorkeepers or *concierges* are secret agents of the Prefecture de Police.—[Trans.]

Despite this rejoinder Magloire remained for a moment pensive. "Am I mistaken?" he asked himself. "But, then——" However, his hesitation was of short duration. "At all events we must clear up the mystery," he added, and leaving the house he went in search of the commissary.

Joyful the Tarots had certainly seemed as they climbed the stairs, singing a popular ditty. They were laden with field flowers, which the wife tastefully arranged in two large blue vases as soon as they had entered their lodging.

"Now, Clementina," called the husband, "you must make haste with the supper, or else the concert will be over by the time we get there."

Both Tarot and his wife were very partial to the entertainments given at a little *café concert* in the neighbourhood, and it was with the view of going there that evening, that they had returned so early from their excursion.

"Oh ! I've only the stew to warm," answered the wife ; "but, Eugène, while I light the fire would you mind running down to fetch a quart of wine?"

The husband took an empty bottle from a corner in the kitchen and went toward the outer door of the apartment, but when only halfway he paused with surprise.

Rat-tat-tat, rat-tat-tat. Some very noisy visitor indeed demanded admittance.

"Who's there?" cried Tarot.

"Open, in the name of the law," answered a stern voice.

Husband and wife turned pale with terror.

"Open, in the name of the law," repeated the same voice.

Still Tarot did not budge. Fear seemed to root him to the spot.

There was no further parleying, for at that moment Maître Magloire perceived that the key had been left in the door outside. So he just turned it and walked in, followed by his comrade and the commissary of police.

On perceiving the latter functionary, whose stomach was spanned with his broad tricolour sash of office, Tarot and his wife were seized with a nervous trembling, of which Maître Magloire took careful note.

"Why didn't you open the door?" sternly asked the commissary of police.

"I was so surprised—monsieur—I didn't know—I—" stammered Tarot.

"Ah, you look as if you had something on your conscience," retorted the functionary, "I suppose you know what has brought us here?"

Tarot gave the commissary an anxious look, and stammered an incomprehensible answer.

"We have come to make a perquisition," said Maître Magloire. "Do you know that your employer, M. Jandidier of the Rue du Roi de Sicile, has disappeared? He was last seen in your company late on Saturday night."

Both Tarot and his wife were too overwhelmed to speak.

"Come give us the keys of all your drawers and cupboards," said the commissary ; and as the wife timidly drew them from her pocket he

added, turning to the detective : "There you are, Maître Magloire, you may set about your task."

The search was a protracted and a difficult one, for dusk had now set in, and a careful scrutiny could scarcely be made by lamp light. However, all the drawers were turned out, and all the cupboards carefully explored. Magloire ferreted in every nook and corner, ripped up the mattresses and pillows on the bed, tried the stuffing of the chairs, but all to no avail. Nothing suspicious could be found.

"It's singular," muttered the detective ; and he once more asked himself, "Have I been mistaken after all?"

At this moment it occurred to him to look at the Tarots who stood by, watching the proceedings in silence. Perhaps their demeanour might give him a clue ; otherwise he and his companions would have no other resource but to apologise and withdraw. At first he observed nothing particular, save an expression of affright in their looks, but as he carefully followed the direction of the wife's glance, he noticed that it was fixed on a birdcage hanging near the window. "Eureka !" he cried, "I have it !"

Springing towards the cage he unhooked it, and careless of the canary roosting on the perch, he examined it in every sense. As in most cages there was a movable floor which drew out to admit of proper cleansing, and sure enough, between the thin boards, Maître Magloire found a sum of twelve hundred francs in bank notes.

The Tarots exchanged looks of terror. The husband seemed overwhelmed, but the wife broke out into piteous lamentations, repeating again and again that she and her husband were innocent.

However, the commissary and Magloire paid little or no attention to her wailings. "You had much better make a clean breast of it," exclaimed the detective, "instead of kicking up that row." Whereupon both husband and wife answered in piteous tones : "Oh ! we are innocent, sir, we are innocent !"

This time the detective shrugged his shoulders. "In the name of the law, I arrest you," said he. "I charge you with the murder of M. Jandidier." And he called to the two *gardiens de la Paix*, waiting below, to come upstairs.

The Tarots showed no signs of resistance, but as they were charged with a capital offence, the commissary thought it prudent to have them hand-cuffed. They passively allowed themselves to be removed to a cab which was sent for, and half an hour later they crossed the threshold of the Dépôt, and were duly locked into separate cells.

Magloire was fairly elated, and, forgetful of discipline, hurried off to the private residence of the investigating magistrate, to acquaint him with the capture and the recovery of M. Jandidier's money. The magistrate was pleased to express his approval, and renewed the appointment for the following morning at his office at the Palais de Justice.

The Tarots were interrogated separately. They both looked pale and careworn when they entered the magistrate's office, but, after passing the night under lock and key in a prison cell, this was only natural. However, they had both found their tongues again, and apparently they had preconcerted a system of defence, for their answers were identical.

They admitted that M. Jandidier had called on them on the Saturday evening. He seemed very poorly, and they asked him if he would not like to take a drop of something, but he refused the offer.

"What was the object of his visit?" asked the magistrate.

"He wished us to execute an important order, and proposed that we should take workpeople on our own account."

"That's singular. Had he not numerous workmen of his own?"

"Yes, but he said that his health was failing him, that he could no longer give his usual attention to business, and should prefer to transfer the order to us."

"And what was your answer?"

"We told him that we lacked the capital to execute it."

"Ah!—ah! And what then?"

"Why, he replied, 'Oh, that's of no consequence. I'll advance you enough money;' and he pulled out his pocket-book, and laid twelve hundred francs in bank notes on the table."

"Had he so much confidence as that in you?"

"Well, he knew we worked fairly well."

"Yes, but you have dissipated habits. You spend your money faster than you earn it. Your story is altogether improbable. M. Jandidier must have known how prodigal you both were. Well, did you at least give him a receipt?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Who signed it?"

"We both did."

"H'm, and what then?"

"After that," answered Tarot, "M. Jandidier asked me to see him further on. He said he was going in the direction of the Faubourg St. Antoine."

"And where did you leave him?"

"At the Place de la Bastille. We crossed the Constantine foot bridge and followed the canal."

"Ah! you followed the canal?" exclaimed the magistrate, eyeing Tarot attentively. "And you reached the Place de la Bastille safely?"

"Certainly we did, monsieur," answered the workman, with a flushed face.

Naturally enough, the magistrate asked both the husband and the wife to explain why they had hidden the money in the birdcage, and they each gave the same answer. On the Sunday night, as they were going home, Tarot met a comrade who, while he was playing cards in a wine-shop in the Marais during the afternoon, had heard of M. Jandidier's disappearance. The news greatly frightened them, and Tarot said to his wife, "If it were known that he came here on Saturday night, it would be a bad job for us. Didn't we cross the bridge together, and walk along the banks of the canal? The police would certainly suspect me, and if those twelve hundred francs were found in our possession, we should be altogether lost."

"We didn't sleep all Sunday night," said Tarot's wife; "we lay awake thinking about M. Jandidier. And we certainly shouldn't have gone out on the Monday, if one of my husband's cousins hadn't come to

fetch us according to arrangement. However, in the country we almost forgot about the matter, and as the detective says, we were no doubt gay when we came home. Before going out, I wanted to burn the bank notes, but Tarot wouldn't let me. He meant to refund the money to M. Jandidier's family, he said ; and besides, as he explained, we might have put ourselves in a bad position by destroying the notes, for, even if M. Jandidier were dead, his body might be found with our receipt in his pocket, and then we should have to refund the money ; and how could we do so if the notes were destroyed ? ”

The magistrate listened attentively to this explanation, which was plausible if not probable, and the prisoners' line of defence struck him as a very artful one. “ How did you know,” he asked at length, “ how did you know that M. Jandidier's body had not been found when the police searched your place ? It might have been recovered, and the detectives might have had your receipt with them. It was your duty to produce that money at once. Why didn't you do so ? ”

“ We didn't know what to do or what to think, monsieur ; we were too frightened.”

“ Innocent persons have no reason to feel frightened,” sententiously retorted the magistrate. “ Justice knows how to distinguish between the innocent and the guilty.”

He said this, and yet, at that very moment, he was asking himself in sore perplexity, “ Are these people culpable or not ? ” After all, there was nothing to corroborate the explanation of the Tarots, and it was utterly impossible for him to content himself with their mere word. A further search must be made for M. Jandidier. Perhaps his body might be found, and then it would be possible to form a positive opinion. In the meanwhile, the workman and his wife must be retained in custody.

IV.

A WEEK elapsed, and the magistrate was still in the same perplexity. The Tarots had each been re-examined three times, but nothing fresh had been elicited from them, and their later statements failed to contradict their earlier version. Were they innocent, then ? Or had they merely cleverly preconceived a plausible system of defence ?

M. Jandidier's remains had been searched for far and wide. The Seine and the canal had been dragged. The missing manufacturer's photograph had been sent all over France, but utterly without result. In this situation, the magistrate asked himself what course he ought to pursue. If he sent the prisoners to the assizes they would very likely be acquitted for want of sufficient proofs, especially if they were defended by a skilful advocate. No doubt there was the circumstance of those twelve hundred francs found in their possession ; but would that suffice to ensure a conviction ? The prisoners explained their possession of this money in a most artful fashion, and, besides, the true *corpus delicti* was wanting. What should the magistrate do then ?

He was asking himself this question for the hundredth time, when a strange, almost incredible report reached his ears. The well known firm of Jandidier *ainé* had suspended payment, and was going into

bankruptcy ! "Who would have expected that !" grumbled the magistrate. "Well, perhaps, we are coming to the truth."

On the morrow a detective who had been duly instructed, brought him a full report of circumstances which none of M. Jandidier's family had ever dreamed of. The revelation was an astounding one, and had caused immense surprise throughout the district of the Marais where M. Jandidier had been so respected and esteemed. In fact, the man whom the denizens of the Rue du Roi de Sicile so delighted to honour, the idol of the trade in imitation jewellery, had fallen from his pedestal with a crash. People had imagined he was wealthy, and yet in reality he was ruined—utterly ruined : and during the last three years he had only kept up his credit by means of expedients. Less than a thousand francs had been found in his safe, and on the Saturday after his disappearance, bills for sixty-seven thousand five hundred francs were presented for payment by the Bank of France. Yes, Jandidier, the man of severe morality, gambled at the Bourse ; the virtuous husband kept a mistress !

The magistrate could scarcely believe his ears, and was giving vent to his astonishment when Maître Magloire appeared, quite out of breath.

"You know the news, monsieur ?" asked the detective as he crossed the threshold.

"Yes, I have just been told everything."

"The Tarots are innocent !"

"I think so—and yet that visit Jandidier paid them—how do you explain that visit ?"

The detective sighed. "Ah, monsieur," said he, "I was a fool, as my colleague, Monsieur Lecoq, has just shown me. You will recollect that at the Café Turc, Jandidier and his friends talked all the time about life assurances ?"

"Yes, I remember ; but what connection—"

"Ah ! monsieur, that was the point I ought to have kept in mind ! Jandidier's life was assured for 200,000 francs."

"Indeed !"

"Yes, and as you are aware, monsieur, in France assurance companies don't pay when the holder of a policy commits suicide. Now, Jandidier was no doubt anxious to provide for his family ; and so he made it appear as if he had been murdered, in hopes that the companies would pay his wife."

"Do you think he has destroyed himself ?"

"I cannot say, monsieur, At all events we cannot find his remains. May be he has simply taken himself off. And yet I don't know ; he can only have had very little money with him, and at his age a man scarcely has the courage to begin life over again. At all events, he certainly laid a trap for poor Tarot, and would have sent him to the guillotine for the sake of his policies being paid."

"What a scamp !" growled the magistrate ; and he took up his pen to sign an order for the release of the workman and his wife.

* * * * *

Thanks to M. Gustave Schmidt—of the great house of Schmidt, Gubenheim, and Worb—the firm of Jandidier did not go into bankruptcy. Old Schmidt had just died, most opportunely, and M. Gustave

was able to dispose of the paternal inheritance as he pleased, and more than that, he means to dispose of himself as well, for the papers announce that he and Mademoiselle Thérèse Jandidier are to be married next month.

Tarot and his wife have set up in business, thanks to the twelve hundred francs returned to them at M. Gustave's request ; and, mindful of the investigating magistrate's reproaches anent their "prodigality" and "dissipated habits," they have quite given up "merry-making" on Mondays.

But what has become of M. Jandidier ? Is he dead, or has he gone to America ? If any of our readers are acquainted with his whereabouts, they may communicate with the authorities, who offer a thousand francs reward !

THAT UNFORTUNATE HOUSE.

L.

Is it slander, or is it the truth? At all events, for years and years the most dreadful stories have been told concerning our Parisian landlords, and it is certainly high time to try and say something in their favour.

What is the great charge brought against them? Are they not mainly accused of perpetually and unjustifiably raising their rents? And yet, strange as it may seem, there are some landlords who refrain from this detestable practice; and we, at least, know one of them, who positively exists in flesh and bones, and whose address we might easily furnish.

He is called the Viscount de B——, and he is young, amiable, and witty. He was peacefully living on his income of thirty thousand francs a year, when some six months ago he had the misfortune to lose one of his uncles, a most hard-fisted miser, and the good fortune to inherit his property, valued at a couple of million francs.

On glancing over his uncle's papers, the Viscount de B—— ascertained that his inheritance comprised a house situated in the Rue de la Victoire, in the heart of the fashionable quarter of the Chaussée d'Antin. He ascertained also, that his defunct relative had purchased this house in the year 1849, for the sum of three hundred thousand francs, and that its rental brought in a clear profit of eighty-two thousand francs a year.

"That is really too much," thought the viscount, who is a most generous minded young man: "Why, it makes more than twenty-seven per cent. per annum; and who ever heard of house property yielding as much as that? My uncle was really too avaricious. His conduct was worthy of an usurer. I cannot countenance such practices. They would dishonour the great name I bear. On the contrary, I will lower the rents, and all my tenants will bless me."

Having come to this decision, the viscount sent for the doorkeeper of the house in question. In Paris, it should be remembered, all the houses are provided with doorkeepers, whose duties are not merely confined to playing the part of a Cerberus. They are charged with keeping the hall and the staircases spick and span. They received the correspondence of the tenants residing on the various flats, and habitually read their postcards and such newspapers as they may be partial to, before taking them upstairs. Snappish and exacting on quarter days when, in

the landlord's name, they apply for payment of the different rentals, they become all milk and honey towards the approach of the new year, in view of obtaining the usual seasonable gratuity. In many matters, they are omnipotent. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the tenant never sees his landlord. It is the doorkeeper who lets out the flats, who receives the rent, and who gives warning if you are unfortunate enough to displease him. It is indeed essential for the Parisian that he should be on good terms with his doorkeeper, for, otherwise, his letters go astray ; his friends are habitually told that he is not at home ; his tradesmen are warned to allow him no credit ; and the whole neighbourhood is taught to regard him with distrust and contempt. For the house hunter, also, it is a *sine qua non* that he should first of all please the doorkeeper he has to deal with. You perceive a board announcing unfurnished apartments to let ; you enter the house and respectfully ask the Cerberus to give you the necessary particulars. He eyes you from head to foot, and if your looks are not to his liking, he drives you away by asking double the rent which the landlord would be satisfied to take. Even, if your person inspires him with no distrust, he shows himself terribly exacting. It is often by the landlord's instructions that he warns you that cats, dogs, and children are not suffered in the house, but on his own account, he will frequently add that every one must be indoors by eleven o'clock, and that pianos and evening parties which occasion so much racket, will not be tolerated. And yet his own daughter plays the piano in the *loge*, and a party of choice spirits gather round his own fireside two or three times a week.

Monsieur Bernard, who filled the functions of doorkeeper at the viscount's house in the Rue de la Victoire, was neither better nor worse than the majority of his colleagues. He had held his appointment for so many years that he began to look upon the house as his own property, and would constantly assail the petty tenants who lived on the topmost floor with such phrases as, "Be careful not to dirty MY stairs," or "You make a dreadful noise overhead. I won't allow such disturbance in MY house." On the other hand, it is true that he was always obsequiously polite to the banker who lived on the first floor, and that he treated the baroness on the second flat with gracious affability.

On one point at least, Monsieur Bernard would never compromise with his principles. He who possessed a pet cat and a daughter yet in her teens, was utterly opposed to his tenants being burdened with children or animals. One day when there was a vacant apartment to let in his house, a newly married couple asked to see it, and found it so much to their taste that they were anxious to have a lease. There was apparently no reason why M. Bernard should refuse them, for they had no dogs, and no children, and were habitually in bed by ten o'clock at night. And, yet, the worthy doorkeeper was not satisfied.

"How long have you been married ?" he asked.

"Six months," was the reply.

"Do you *think* of having any children ?"

The husband laughed, and the young wife flushed scarlet.

"You see," judiciously observed M. Bernard. "You are not to be depended on. If a lease were signed, I shouldn't be able to give you

notice to quit whenever I chose. So, I think it would be safer for you to come in as quarterly tenants; and mind, if madame *does* happen to have a baby, you will have to leave."

The first blow that the worthy doorkeeper had received, for many a long year, was the death of the Viscount de B——'s uncle, the miserly old landlord, who extorted such fabulous rentals out of his unfortunate tenants. Bernard was so accustomed to his quarters in the Rue de la Victoire, and so habituated to regard himself as the ruler, if not as the real owner of the house, that he asked himself with no little dread, "I wonder what this viscount is like?" He trembled at the idea that M. de B—— might possibly dispense with his services; and for once in a way, was pleased to treat the usually despised tenants with singular deference and politeness. He had read Lafontaine's fables, be it noted, and remembered the story of the lion and the mouse.

On receiving his new master's summons, Bernard realised that the decisive moment was at hand. Everything depended on this interview; either he would be dismissed or else confirmed in his viceregal functions. Hence he approached the viscount with a profound reverence, and respectfully awaited his decision. "You are the doorkeeper of the house in the Rue de la Victoire, I believe," said M. de B——. "My uncle, I am told, was satisfied with your services, and I trust that you will attend to my interests with equal care."

"Oh! monsieur le vicomte may rest assured—"

"Very good, very good. I confirm you in your post; but I have something else to tell you. You must immediately inform all the tenants on my behalf, that I intend to lower their rents. In future, the rentals shall be fixed at two thirds of what they now amount to."

Those incredible, fantastic words, "lower the rents," fell like so many brick-bats on Bernard's head; and, for a moment, he remained stupefied. Surely he must be mistaken, surely he had misunderstood his master; and so, partially regaining his self-possession, he stammered: "Lower the rents? monsieur the viscount must be joking. *Lower* them? monsieur must have meant *increase* them."

"No, my good man, I never spoke more seriously in my life. I said and I repeat—'*lower* them.'"

This time the doorkeeper was so surprised, so utterly astonished, that he quite forgot his subordinate position, and exclaimed, "Monsieur the viscount can't have reflected. He will regret his decision before the day's over. Lower the rents! Why, nobody ever heard of such a thing or ever will! What will people think of monsieur the viscount if this becomes known? What will be said in the neighbourhood? For it is clear—"

"Monsieur Bernard," interrupted the viscount, "I don't like my servants to murmur when I give an order. You have heard my decision. Very good, you may retire; and, above everything, don't let me hear any more observations."

The worthy doorkeeper staggered like a drunken man as he left the viscount's mansion and turned in the direction of the Rue de la Victoire. His brain was fairly whirling, and he wondered whether he were awake or asleep. Surely he must be dreaming—surely a fit of nightmare must have given him these fantastic ideas.

"Lower the rents," he muttered as he stumbled along. "Lower the rents! It's incredible. Perhaps, if the tenants complained—but they don't complain! On the contrary, their money is always ready every quarter day. Dear me, dear me. If the viscount's uncle, the worthy man, only hears of this in his tomb, how savage he will feel. Surely his nephew is going mad! Lower the rents! Why, that young man ought to be provided with a guardian. He'll certainly come to a bad end. I can't explain it—either he's a lunatic or else he drank too much wine at lunch."

II.

WORTHY Bernard was so pale when he reached home—so pale and so crushed, that as soon as his wife and his daughter, Amanda, perceived him they asked in one breath, "What has happened to you? What is the matter?"

"Nothing," he gasped with a sigh. "Nothing—absolutely nothing."

But Madame Bernard was not so easily deceived. Her rubicund cheeks and nose turned fairly blue with apprehension, and her bosom heaved and sank like the stormy sea. She was a stout person, stout and short, scarcely gifted with any neck at all; and when persons of this description are visited with any violent emotion, an unpleasant fit of apoplexy is apt to result. Fortunately, Mademoiselle Amanda was there to succour her. The young damsel had nothing to fear for her self for she was tall and slim, like her father, and her neck was well-nigh as extended as a crane's. She forced her mother to sit down, and compelled her to imbibe a drop of something in hopes of dispelling her emotion.

But it was a minute or two before Madame Bernard came round again, and had strength enough to speak. "Ah! Bernard," she moaned. "How cruel of you to put me to this torture. You are hiding something? Come, speak, I will be strong. Terrible as the news may be, anything would be better than this suspense. Come, what did the new landlord say to you? Does he think of dismissing us?"

"Oh! If it were only that! But listen. As surely as I'm standing here, as sure as my name's Bernard, I heard him with my own ears—I heard him say with his own lips—I heard him—but you would never believe me!"

"Speak, speak!" gasped Madame Bernard, agonising with suspense.

"So you are determined? Then, let it be so. Well, he ordered me to inform all the tenants that he meant to lower their rents—yes, lower their rents. You are listening, eh? Lower their rents!"

While he spoke Madame Bernard had fairly gone off into hysterics, and Mademoiselle Amanda was so convulsed with laughter that she was quite unable to attend her mother.

"Oh! you dreadful man!" cried the latter as she recovered herself. "What a dreadful joke! Lower the rents—ah! ah! ah! Oh, my poor head, my poor head. You might have killed me, Bernard. What a dreadful joke!"

In the meanwhile, Mademoiselle Amanda hastened to her piano. Like very many doorkeepers' daughters this young person was a pupil of the Conservatoire de Musique, and familiar with the productions of the great composers. So, elongating her crane's neck, and distending her mouth, whilst her fingers darted here and there over the ivory notes, she began to warble Verdi's celebrated air :

*"Etrange aventure,
Bizarre imposture,
Jamais, je le jure,
On ne te croira,
Nous fais tu l'injure !" . . .*

However, M. Bernard claimed to be the master at home, and his angry voice soon put a stop to his daughter's merriment. The worthy man was altogether enraged to find that his wife and Amanda treated the dreadful calamity which had befallen them as a joke, and he roundly upbraided them for their unseemly conduct.

"Unseemly conduct !" retorted Madame Bernard, warming up in her turn. "And to think that you nearly killed me with fright—you good for nothing man ! Unseemly conduct, why, your's is unseemly enough. The idea ! To come home with such a cock-and-bull story indeed. I'll be bound you've been drinking, for you smell terribly of spirits. As if the landlord was such a fool as to lower the rents ! You must have taken that order at some wine shop."

If Mademoiselle Amanda had not intervened, it is probable that the worthy couple would have come to blows. As it was, they exchanged some very angry and very nasty words to the astonishment of several tenants who passed in and out of the house. Bernard repeated the viscount's order again and again, but his wife obstinately refused to believe him. At length, in her determination to prove that he was a liar, she put on her bonnet and shawl, and hastened to the viscount's residence with all the speed that her short fat limbs and portly form permitted.

Ah ! she was cruelly mortified to find that Bernard had spoken the truth. With her own ears she heard the incredible, fatal order repeated. However, as she was a prudent woman she asked the viscount to be kind enough to give her the order in writing, and M. de B——, much amused, was pleased to humour her fancy.

Madame Bernard was almost as astounded as her husband had been, and asked herself, whether it would be right to obey such fantastic instructions. The worthy couple and their daughter deliberated on the point during the whole evening ; and it was only with great reluctance, that they decided to act upon the viscount's orders. At one moment Madame Bernard suggested that it would, perhaps, be best to warn the young man's relatives, who might have influence enough to prevent the consummation of such folly ; but her husband pointed out that after all M. de B—— was the master, and that even if his relatives were persuaded to interfere, some time must elapse without result, and that in the interval they, Bernard, wife, and daughter, might be ordered off the premises. This last eventuality was of all things to be avoided.

"After all," remarked Mademoiselle Amanda, with youthful thoughtlessness, "it's no affair of our's."

But this reflection, which a philosopher might have been pleased with, was scarcely calculated to console her parents. Had they not lived in that house so many years? Had they not, over and over again, jubilantly received the old landlord's orders to "raise" the rents; and now must they announce that they were to be lowered? It almost seemed as if they themselves were about to lose the sums which the tenants would no longer have to pay—and after all, this was not so very surprising, for after such a long term of vice-royalty, they had almost begun to regard the house as their own. It was with a deep, deep sigh, that M. Bernard turned off the gas that night; and although he certainly went to bed—more from habit than from choice—I fear that his slumber was uneasy and of short duration.

III.

ON the following morning, the unfortunate doorkeeper donned his best black coat and went up stairs. It was necessary that he should communicate the great news to the three-and-twenty tenants of the house. Ten minutes later the whole building was in an uproar. People who had lived for four years on the same floor, without even exchanging a "good morning" or a "good night," or even a simple bow, met and instantly engaged in conversation.

"You know the news, monsieur."

"It's very extraordinary."

"Say incredible."

"The landlord has lowered my rent."

"Taken a third of it off, eh? He's done just the same with mine."

"It's wonderful."

"There must be a mistake."

Despite the statements of M. Bernard and his wife, despite the written order, there were several tenants who equalled St. Thomas in their reluctance to believe. Three of them thought fit to write and inform the landlord of what was happening, and charitably warn him that the doorkeeper was in a fit state to be removed to a lunatic asylum.

It was necessary that the viscount should answer these sceptical tenants, and he did so, fully confirming Bernard's statements.

Doubt was no longer possible, the rents were really to be lowered. Such an unusual event was bound to occasion unlimited surprise and comment.

"Why does the landlord lower the rents?"

"Yes, why?"

"What motive can have caused such singular conduct? For, certainly, he must have had some very serious motive. An intelligent man in the enjoyment of his senses doesn't deprive himself of a large portion of his income for the mere pleasure of receiving less money. Such conduct must be occasioned by some very powerful reason. A man only acts like this under compulsion, but who, or rather what can have compelled the Viscount de B—— to behave in this fashion? It's very strange, unaccountably strange. There must be some mystery we know nothing about."

Such was the chorus through the house—"There's some mystery. What can it be?"

From the first floor to the garrets under the roof, all the tenants indulged in unlimited conjectures. They racked their brains in trying to imagine what was the motive of the landlord's decision. The banker, who spent his life amassing money by fair means or foul, was astounded that the viscount should relinquish part of his income. The baroness on the second floor, who had once had a château of her own, opined that she would not have acted in this foolish manner. The fashionable corn-cutter, who lived a storey higher up, was so perplexed and so absorbed in trying to guess the enigma, that in his absent-mindedness he almost sliced a customer's toes off. To say the truth, all the tenants looked pre-occupied. To see them, you might have imagined they were trying to guess some unanswerable riddle.

After the questions came the suppositions. This mystery made people feel nervous. Some said: "No doubt the landlord formerly committed some dreadful crime which has remained unpunished. Remorse has inspired him with ideas of philanthropy."

"Well, it's by no means pleasant to live in a house belonging to such a scoundrel; for—after all—it's all very well to show repentance—but in that line of business, people often have a second try."

"Is the house really solid?" asked another tenant.

"Hum—well, only so-so, no doubt."

"But it isn't very old."

"That's true; but it had to be propped up when they were digging the new sewer in March, last year."

Some imagined that the danger came from the roof. Others declared they had strong reasons to believe that a gang of coiners plied their calling in the cellars, and pretended that at night time they had even heard the heavy thud of machinery. Others, again, opined that there might be some Russian or Prussian spies on the premises. One gentleman, who had a great reputation for acumen, was inclined to fancy that the landlord thought of stealthily setting the house on fire, with the view of obtaining a large sum from the insurance companies, which, as everyone is aware, are always delighted to pay the amounts specified in their policies.

And, moreover, there were rumours of some extraordinary, frightful things. It was asserted that strange, inexplicable noises were heard in some of the garrets on the sixth floor, and that phantoms might be seen at midnight dragging clanking chains down the staircases. It is true that this report came from an elderly lady who was troubled with a bad digestion, and who, no doubt, frequently had bad dreams, not to say nightmares. Still, it caused a profound impression on all the women in the house, and especially on all the servant girls. One of the latter, who had gone down to the cellar one evening, with the view of stealing some bottles of her mistress's wine for the benefit of her "follower"—a private of dragoons—vowed that she had encountered the ghost of the old landlord. She had recognised him perfectly; and, indeed, there could be no doubt of the ghost's identity, for it carried a receipt for rent in one hand, and a notice to quit in the other. The girl was picked up in the cellar in an almost insensible state. Four broken wine bottles

lay near her, and she declared she had dropped them in her fright. They were all empty, but as they were broken this was not to be wondered at. It is true that in the consternation which followed no one thought of remarking that two of these bottles were uncorked, otherwise, some people might have decided that the damsel was given to tipping, and looked after her own interests as well as her gallant's. Of course, her explanation was that the wine was intended for her mistress's lunch on the morrow. But M. Bernard was acquainted with the dragoon guard, and guessed part if not all of the truth.

IV

UNEASINESS had followed surprise, and uneasiness was succeeded by terror. The banker, mindful of his cashbox which he no longer considered safe, gave notice that he meant to move. M. Bernard, as in duty bound, hastened to inform the landlord of the principal tenant's intention.

"Well, let the fool go," exclaimed the viscount, somewhat surprised that his generosity should cause such a result.

But it was not merely the banker who determined to leave. The baroness's fortune was no doubt safe with her notary, but she had herself to think of, and for fear of accidents she decided to move as well. On the morrow, it was the fashionable corncutter's turn. He declared that his customers were driven away by the bad reputation of the house. The truth is, that his vanity induced him to take this decision. He wished to put himself on a par with the man of money, and the lady of title, and so when some acquaintances asked if it were really true that he meant to change his quarters, he assumed his most self-sufficient air, and answered, "Yes, I mean to move. The banker, the baroness and I, we can't possibly live any longer in such a house. *Our* reputations would suffer."

With such ideas, he would no doubt have been better pleased, had the exodus been confined to himself, and the tenants of the first and second floors, the better to mark the difference that separated a man of his standing from the other folks in the house. But then, the other folks bravely followed the example set them by their superiors; and by the end of the week they had all signified their intention of moving.

The horrible stories of ghosts, and clanking chains, the rumoured presence of spies and coiners, the reported lack of solidity of the house, the fear of a possible conflagration ignited by a criminal hand, all produced their effect. Everyone feared a catastrophe of some kind or another, according to the character of his apprehensions. For instance, the old women and the servant girls dreaded that the ghosts might appear at their bedside at night time, chain them up and carry them off to Hades. Others opined that the spies and coiners might have terrible designs. All agreed that it would be dreadful to be burned alive in bed, and those who had been told that the house lacked solidity, nightly dreaded that in that case the whole six floors might give away without a moment's notice, to the effectual destruction of life and property.

With all these horrible reports, with all these pleasant "prospects"

in view, no wonder that the tenants, and even the least timorous among them, found it difficult to sleep. The occupants of the fourth and fifth floors positively organised patrols which scoured the house at night time, with instructions to warn all the inmates of any danger by means of a huge gong, which one of the party carried.

The servants were altogether terrified, and declared that they could not possibly remain any longer in such a dreadful house. However, their employers succeeded in retaining their services by considerably tripling their wages.

As for worthy M. Bernard, never a stout man, he was now reduced to a skeleton, and utterly worn out with fever and fear. His better half had lost both her rubicund cheeks and her appetite. Her nose had faded from a bright purple to a pale pink, and there was next to nothing left of those buxom charms which had once been her pride, and her husband's delight. There was scarcely any fear of the worthy dame dying of *apoplexy* now. On her side Mademoiselle Amanda had lost all her spirits, and her piano remained untouched.

"No, it is not natural, not natural," repeated the unhappy doorkeeper after each fresh intimation that some tenant meant to move.

In the meanwhile, over the street door dangled numerous boards announcing "apartments to let," and house hunters, as yet ignorant of the truth, called and questioned the doorkeeper.

"Yes," said he, "I have several vacant apartments. In fact, to say the truth, you may make your choice, for the whole house is to let from top to bottom. All the present tenants are going away. In a single week they all made up their minds to move. Nothing is known for certain, but it seems that there are things, strange things—in fact, it's a mystery, a mystery such as no one ever heard of before. To tell you the truth, the landlord has lowered the rents!"

Ah! on hearing that, the house hunters did not wait to ask Bernard to show them the apartments. They did not even take the time to thank him for his information, but they fled—fled in terror, without pausing to draw breath till they were out of the house and well-nigh out of the street.

Quarter day came, and the Rue de la Victoire was blocked up with a procession of huge vans, all bearing the well known name of Bailly, with the mention, "Furniture removed to town or country." They had come in search of the goods and chattels of the three and twenty tenants. The courtyard of the house and the footway, for a hundred yards in either direction, were bestrewn with household objects, far into the afternoon, but, finally, the last load was packed into the last van, and the last tenant went away. There was nobody left—nobody but the unfortunate doorkeeper and his family. Even the rats and mice, finding nothing more to eat, thought it best to start on a voyage of discovery in search of a new home.

Poor Mr. Bernard grew green with terror. He was haunted with frightful visions at night time. He fancied he could hear horrible groans and shrieks. When the wind moaned through the desolate rooms, his hair started on his head with such force, that his night cap was almost propelled off his head. As for his wife, she no longer closed her eyes.

Mademoiselle Amanda, despite her predilection for the theatrical profession, despite her talents on the piano, despite the encouragement she had received from her professors at the Conservatoire, sacrificed all her hopes and ambition for the mere sake of leaving the paternal fireside. She had dreamed of the glories of the stage, of gorgeous theatrical costumes, of lime light streaming upon her person, of applause and bouquets and calls before the curtain. But a term of probation was yet necessary, and rather than wait, rather than remain in that terrible house with its groaning ghosts and their clanking chains, she renounced the "profession" and all its works, and married a young barber whom she altogether disliked.

At last, one morning—after another sleepless night, more terrible if possible than the previous ones—Bernard took a great resolution. He dragged himself to the viscount's residence, handed in his resignation, and found himself another home.

* * * * *

And, now, if you be in Paris, and pass along the Rue de la Victoire, you will perceive an empty, desolate, abandoned house. It's story is the one I have just related. Dust and dirt begrime the closed shutters. Grass grows in the silent courtyard. House hunters never apply there; and the building enjoys such a dreadful reputation in the vicinity, that neighbouring property has considerably lost in value.

Landlords, mark my words, this is what comes of lowering your rents!

THE SEMINARY.

I.

I WAS anxious to enter the church, but my father was only a poor farmer tilling land which did not belong to him, and bad harvests had so reduced his circumstances that there seemed little chance of my hopes being realised. Fortunately the venerable, kind-hearted priest of our village—our village of Laroche-pâtour, overlooking the Loire, where I had been born and bred—had long taken an interest in me. To him I owed almost everything I knew, and my progress seemed to afford him infinite pleasure. But, if I were to be ordained, it was necessary I should enter the Seminary and undergo a long course of study and training; and would the Superior admit me, for with my father's scanty means he could only afford to pay a very modest fee. However, our priest did not abandon me; his teachings had first inspired me with a desire to devote my life to religious labour; and so in this emergency he told my father that he was well acquainted with the Father Superior, and that he would write him a letter which in all probability would suffice to ensure my admission.

It was arranged that my father and myself should journey to the town with this precious letter of recommendation, and explain our situation to the Superior, who would no doubt consent to receive me for a reduced amount. Eager as I was to enter the priesthood I was after all a mere lad, and at the thought of leaving home for the first time I could scarcely remain indifferent. And then I was a son, and fondly loved my mother. Our parting was bitter indeed on the morning appointed for the journey; but at last I tore myself away, and followed my father down the road. As we approached the town, change of scene and anxiety as to the result of our application diverted my thoughts from memory of home. I looked to the future, and prayed for success.

For five minutes or so we had skirted a high gloomy wall, fringed above with broken glass—such a wall as might have begirded some prison enclosure—when at last we came to a little door, surmounted by a cross of black wood, secured in the stone work. A narrow aperture, trebly barred with iron and closed on the inner side, was cut in the central panel.

My father halted—"I fancy it must be here, my lad," said he.

"Yes, I'm certain of it," I answered. "I passed by last year with our priest, and he showed me this door as well as the great entrance, which is scarcely ever used, at the end of the wall."

"All right then," added my father with a sigh. "Well, boy, are you still decided? You'd never be one too many at home, you know. There'd always be a place for you at table, and by the fire; and if you've reflected on the road, if you felt your heart give way at the thought of leaving us, your mother and me, why speak out; there's nought to be ashamed of. And we'd go back home, as we came here, together. By my faith, I shouldn't be the one to complain."

My father's feelings were plain enough, but it seemed to me that I ought to show more resolution. "My mind is made up," I answered.

My father heaved another sigh, and then slowly and as if regretfully raised the knocker of the door. We heard a bolt being drawn back, and the next minute the shutter of the little aperture moved aside and a pale face, and a pair of nervous eyes appeared against the bars. The eyes scanned us attentively, and I thought it would be necessary for us to state our business before proceeding any further. I was mistaken. The door was set ajar—just sufficiently for us to glide in sideways—and was then swiftly, noiselessly closed again. Had it been opened wider or for a longer time, the doorkeeper would no doubt have feared the ingress of the tainted atmosphere of the outer world.

As I crossed the threshold, and looked at the doorkeeper, I felt ill at ease. He was a short fat little man with a clean shaven face, wearing a dark coloured coat of clerical cut, which corresponded admirably with his physiognomy. He had a look of idiotic satisfaction. His straight hair of a dirty yellow tinge fully harmonized with his complexion. A beatified smile lingered on his thick lips, which seemed perpetually on the point of mumbling an *oremus*. His pendant flabby cheeks would have called from a peasant the remark: "That's bad fat, and no mistake." As for his eyes, they seemed bedimmed, but at times they glanced askance with a feline gleam. This devout looking personage carried a prayer-book in one hand, and a chaplet of beads hung half out of his waistcoat pocket.

Despite his servile air of devotion, and his grotesquely humble aspect, this doorkeeper thought fit to assume a self-sufficient tone in speaking to us. Although I was but a child, I explained this by the difference of our attire; and I was right. His clerical coat was luxurious in comparison with our country-made jackets. He examined us for a good minute or more, and then being apparently satisfied, asked, "What do you desire?"

"I have a letter for the Reverend Father Superior of the little Seminary," replied my father. "It is sent him by the priest of our village."

"Give it me," rejoined the doorkeeper.

My father placed his hat on the ground, and with both hands began to fumble in his pockets. At last he drew forth the precious missive—that recommendation which seemed worth a fortune, and what a fortune—my admission into the little seminary, gratis.

The doorkeeper took the letter, and without a word, handed it to another man, who seemed an exact counterpart of himself. The latter at once glided noiselessly away.

My father was standing erect in a corner of the room. He apparently felt humbled by the doorkeeper's important mein, as well as by the

austere aspect of the apartment. He had not dared to pick up his hat again.

For myself, I had at least sufficient courage to glance at the surroundings. We were in a most mournful-looking room. A wainscoting of common wood, painted in imitation of polished oak, ran round the walls, which, above, were tinted grey. The angular and scanty furniture—symmetrically disposed—evinced signs of frequent polishing. Everything was remarkably clean as is usual in ecclesiastical abodes. On crossing the threshold, the eye instinctively turned towards a huge crucifix, a most lamentable production, bedaubed with fantastic hues, and modelled in all defiance of perspective and anatomy. It was purely and simply an outrage upon the majesty of Providence, an insult to Christian art, and was evidently the work of some ignorant artisan of the neighbourhood. On a scroll above the cross, I read the Saviour's words in Latin: "*Sinite parvulos ad me venire*"—"Suffer the little children to come unto me."

Several other inscriptions decorated the walls, but they were all in French, and remarkably appropriate for the spot: "The time given to the world, is lost for Heaven." "The wise man's lips only open to praise the Lord." "God is omnipotent; He sees, He hears everything." Beneath this last maxim I noticed an aperture, which served as the receptacle for an acoustical horn, so that if the Lord heard everything that was said in the *parloir*, his ministers must certainly have heard it as well.

II.

THIS aperture served as a mute but eloquent lesson of prudence, and I was still meditating it, when the servant who had taken our letter, returned and signed to us to follow him.

He preceded us down a long passage, the walls of which were covered with maps. There was but little light, for the windows—few and far between—were of dull glass. The atmosphere was impregnated with a stale smell of wax and incense. The same oppressive silence prevailed. The noise of our own footsteps so startled us, that, after the first few paces, we continued our road on tip-toe.

At last, we reached a broad flight of steps, and our guide ushered us into an ante-room, which appeared to me magnificent. A handsome carved bookcase of colossal dimensions, stood on one side; thick curtains of dark coloured velvet garnished the windows; and such a sumptuous carpet was spread over the floor, that I asked myself, if I had not better divest myself of my heavy hob-nailed shoes, which might perhaps, damage the fresh tinted flowers.

Before retiring, the servant pointed out two chairs, but we did not dare sit down. At the sight of all this magnificence, my desire to enter the Church became yet more ardent. Worldly covetousness was blended with religious fervour. What, the simple Father Superior of a petty Seminary possessed such a luxurious abode? Then, what must be the palaces of the princes of religion—our lords, the bishops, the archbishops and cardinals!

The noise of a conversation being carried on in an adjoining room—which I guessed must be the Superior's study—roused me from my reverie. A simple velvet hanging, similar to the curtains, separated us from the sanctuary, and everything that was said, plainly reached my ears. I could distinguish two voices—a woman's and a man's—the latter so sweet, so harmonious, so persuasive that it must have gone straight to the listener's soul. Thus talked, no doubt, the Fathers of the Church, the elect inspired by the Holy Ghost, whose eloquent words thawed the icy covering of the unbeliever's heart, those holy apostles whose discourses subjugated nations. And this voice I now heard, was surely the Superior's. I almost wept with emotion. I longed to gaze upon this priest who was about to become my spiritual father; I prayed for the moment when I might throw myself at his feet.

Still I listened. The Superior was saying, "By bringing your son to our holy house, madame the countess, you assure his happiness, his salvation."

"I know it, monsieur," answered the lady, "it was that idea which sustained me in the struggle. What a struggle it has been. For a year or more, peace has been banished from our household. Three months ago the count, my husband, still refused my request that our son should enter the seminary. He intended—so he said—to send him to college."

The Father Superior heaved a sigh. "To college!" he repeated, "to college! Ah! The count cannot know what establishments colleges are. They are controlled by the state you may say, and the state has sworn to protect religion! But how willfully it breaks its engagements. The pupils of the government colleges become atheists. They are taught to deny the justice of God, to disregard the justice of man. Those colleges are true schools of perdition, nests of immorality, where the masters openly teach the most perfidious liberalism."

"Alas! I knew it," interrupted the countess. "Reverend Father Catulle was careful to warn me."

"He did his duty, madame. Ah! what would become of religion and the good cause, if those who are interested in their defence, armed their children against them?"

"May I dare to tell you—" rejoined the countess, "my husband pretends that the course of study is less advanced at the seminary than at college."

"Prejudice, madame the countess, prejudice. A perverse invention, slander devised by the enemies of religion! But, even supposing it were true, what need is there of vain science, of useless studies?"

"My husband also feared that our son, influenced by holy examples, might one day think of renouncing the world. Certainly, such a result would fill *my* heart with joy. But, then, he is our eldest, the heir to the title, and, duly authorized by Father Catulle, I ventured to promise my husband that—"

"Fear nothing, madame, we will keep your promise. We know how to prepare our children for the career that awaits them on leaving the seminary. Besides, the Lord needs servants everywhere, as much in society as before the altar, and perhaps a day will come when all, combining their efforts—"

At this point the Superior lowered his voice, and only a confused whisper reached me, with now and then perhaps a distinct word, which conveyed, however, no idea to my mind, ignorant as I then was, of the world and of history.

At last, however, I heard a noise of moving chairs, and realised that the interview was drawing to a close.

"Before leaving, monsieur," exclaimed the countess, "there is one essential point I must mention; for my husband is inflexible. Your pupils, I believe, never leave the seminary, except during the summer vacation."

"Yes, madame, that is our rule."

"And yet the count specifies that his son must spend every Sunday at home."

At first, the Superior made no rejoinder. No doubt, he was reflecting. "Our rule is certainly a fixed one," he at length replied. "But it is not immutable. Such a favour as you ask for is conferred on a few families, and your efforts certainly deserve reward. So you have my word—your son may go home as often as you like."

"Then I see no further obstacle, monsieur. God has blessed my enterprise. I will bring you my son on Monday. And now, about the terms?"

"Oh, madame, that is of no account. To say the truth, the matter is not of my province."

"Excuse me, monsieur, but as I am altogether unaware—"

"Oh, madame, my ignorance on that subject is equal to yours! I have so little time to myself. However, you may speak with our worthy treasurer, if you please. Allow me to conduct you to his room."

Immediately afterwards, the velvet hanging was raised, and an extremely beautiful woman, superbly clad, passed into the ante-room where we were waiting. Behind her appeared the Father Superior raising the costly drapery.

I had never seen such a dignified, noble-looking priest. He was of tall stature, and wore the ecclesiastical costume with consummate grace. His face was handsome, and of a most prepossessing expression. His deep black hair contrasted forcibly with his white brow, and the ivory tint of his cheeks. His blue eyes, bedimmed by long lashes, had an expression of evangelical benevolence: they were no doubt the mirror of a spotless soul.

He acquainted the countess with all the advantages of the Seminary—its southern aspect, the arrangements of the class rooms, the cleanliness of the dormitories, the extent of the playgrounds, the excellence of the meals, and as I listened, with downcast eyes, my mouth watered despite myself. Finally, the Superior opened the window, and showed the countess the magnificent umbrageous trees which shaded the playground, and the garden where the professors read their breviaries of an afternoon.

Before leaving the ante-room, he made us an affectionate sign with the hand, and, whilst we bowed to the ground, I heard him say to the countess in an undertone: "The children of the poor come to us as well, and we receive them. They come impelled by an irresistible vo-

cation, and we bless the Lord, when, thanks to the gifts of those who are favoured by fortune, we are enabled to prepare yet another workman for the Master's vine."

I had some difficulty in recognising the Superior when he returned, after conducting the countess to the treasurer's office, so greatly had he changed. His soft benevolent smile had died away, his glance was cold and piercing, almost threatening, and his mouth had assumed a hard, stern curve. Even his voice was no longer the same—that sweet harmonious, persuasive accent, which had so prepossessed me in his favour, seemed to have been set aside with the benevolent smile—and it was in a harsh tone that he curtly exclaimed: "Follow me."

When the curtain fell behind us, he was already seated at a large writing table, covered with papers. He did not even tell us to sit down. He was re-perusing a letter which I recognised as the recommendation written by our priest. Suddenly he turned to me and asked: "What is your name?"

"Felix, your reverence," I answered in a quaking voice.

"How old are you?"

"Fourteen."

"Fourteen," he repeated, talking to himself—"fourteen. Two years less would have been better. The character is already formed and maybe has taken a turn we cannot modify. We need young children, very young, with pliable natures, which we may mould like wax. And yet we may have a try—perhaps it is still time."

A moment's silence, which seemed to me a century, ensued. At last, he raised his voice again: "His reverence the priest of Laroche-pâtour is convinced that you desire to embrace the most sacred of all callings. He writes to me to that effect. Have you reflected? Is your vocation a sincere one? Will it be durable?"

"I told his reverence the truth," I answered.

"Are you certain? Who can prove it to me?" And turning to my father he added: "And you, do you believe in your son's vocation?"

"The lad isn't given to telling falsehoods," bluntly replied my father.

The Superior's rejoinder was not directly addressed to us. It assumed rather the character of a soliloquy, delivered in an impressive voice for our greater edification no doubt. "Their vocation, their vocation," he exclaimed—"they all have the same answer. What belief, what reliance can be placed in them? Their vocation, they rather mean their ambition. They are anxious to change their lives, anxious to rise, and they apply to us to assist them. Religion is their pretence—the world is their object! The seminary is a necessary trial, a necessary probation, which conducts to the realisation of their desires. They come to us, girt round with impudence, and cloaked with hypocrisy—with lying tongues—for they wish to effect their studies gratis, without unloosing their purse strings. That's the real truth. And perverse parents often favour their design, and seek to deceive us. Generous and credulous, we over and over again allow ourselves to be trapped. Duped a hundred times we nevertheless open our arms to all who present themselves. We find room at our board, we provide food for the body, and food for the mind. We lavish on the applicant the

thrice sacred treasure of the Church—the treasure of the poor, the treasure of the Almighty. And then, what happens? Ah! a day comes, when he casts aside the mask! He chooses the very moment when we hoped to reap what we had sown. without shame he abandons us. . Ah! the lamb was a wolf in sheep's clothing. . we had warmed a serpent in our breast. . His kiss was the kiss of Judas. . . He came like a thief, *ut fur*, and flies rich in stolen charity. Ah! he does not wait for the cock to crow, before denying us. And if that were everything; but no. We have no worse enemies in this world, than those on whom we have lavished our spiritual and temporal riches. They owe us everything; they must have their vengeance. Their mouths pour forth insult and slander. They proclaim that they have discovered our secrets, as if we had any secrets. They seek to blacken us in infamous books, and the heart of the wicked rejoices. The perverts! the renegades! One of them will say, that we have revealed to him our watch word, as if everyone was not aware that our only motto is '*Love and Charity.*' He will put our honour up to auction, like the immaculate garment of the Saviour, and each impious beholder will seek to tear it to shreds. Ah! the unfortunate man! Does he not know that in attacking God's ministers he raises his hand against the Godhead's self—against the Creator who said: 'Touch not the Lord's anointed?' And yet the evil wrought by his apostasy is incalculable, for it causes the flight of our best loved sons, our *delectissimi*, those whose intelligence seemingly promised fervent and able labourers in the Lord's vineyard. And they also will throw aside their tools just as the harvest is at hand. So much tenderness and anxiety lavished in vain! So much care that shall come to nought! And the money lost—the money! For you are poor, of course? It is a purse that you require? You cannot pay for your board?"

These questions coming so suddenly after this long meandering discourse—the full weight of which I did not then realize—and recalling us so brutally to reality, fell upon our ears like peals of thunder. I flushed indignantly. It was my first humiliation. As for my father, he drew himself up as if he were about to answer an insult, and for a moment his eyes flashed fire. But he was soon himself again. Could he reasonably imagine that a priest, a minister of the Divine Word, had purposely meant to insult a poor man?

Plainly, not; and so he merely stammered: "I have a little money, your reverence."

"That is fortunate," replied the Superior: "Come, what can you do?"

"Well, if fifty crowns a year—"

"'Tis little—not even the price of the breakfasts."

"By stinting ourselves at home, the mother and me, we might perhaps make up sixty."

The Superior made a gesture of indecision, and a little discussion followed. My father had to explain his position. We had just had three bad harvests, and the lease of the farm was not a remunerative one. True, there was a little patch of vineland with a good aspect which belonged to us, but my father had borrowed money on it, to buy cattle; and the interest of the loan was superior to the value of the produce.

For the moment, the only income my father could count upon was derived from some land he tilled for the Marquis de Guéblan Vaucourt, with whom he shared the harvests.

At last, a sum of sixty crowns was agreed upon ; but it was specified that if my father's circumstances improved, he should give more.

"And you, my son," exclaimed the Superior, turning to me, "remember that it is thanks to the charity of pious people, that you are privileged to serve God after your heart. Let this thought be always present in your mind. Let it guide you along the path of thorns which falls to the lot of God's ministers ; and let it prevent you from looking back or going astray when once you have put your hand to the plough. You were the Lord's by vocation ; gratitude must now bind you to Him for ever."

The trousseau was next spoken of. I could not remain at the Seminary in the clothes I had worn at Laroche-pâtour. Our priest had warned us of this before we started, and my father had provided himself with all the money he possessed. One by one, he drew from his pocket the old gold pieces, sanctified by labour, and each of which represented the toil of many months, whilst the Superior enumerated all the objects I required. A metal tumbler, silver spoon and fork ; napkin ring ; two pairs of sheets ; twelve towels ; twelve napkins ; a dozen shirts, and so on, for several minutes.

My father's little hoard amounted to little more than 300 francs.

"Come, 'twill do," said the Superior. "The sum is altogether insufficient, but the sacrifices shall be taken into account. Send the sheets, the shirts, the towels, &c. We will make up the rest." He reflected for a moment, and then added, "Yes your son must be decently clothed. I will have him measured. The classes re-assemble in four days ; till then, he must remain as he is. There is nothing more to settle, I think—you may retire."

At that moment I felt my heart fail me, and I burst into tears, as I threw myself into my father's arms.

"Poor lad !" said he, in a sobbing voice, "I expected the conscription would take you, but not *that one*. I was saving up the money to buy you off." At last he dried his tears, and turning to the Superior he asked, "Won't he ever come to see us ?"

"At the next vacation, not before. The rule is formal : no casual holidays. In a single day, a child may lose the fruit of a month's work and good conduct."

"But can't we come to see him here ?"

"It would be as well if you came as seldom as possible."

"Oh, mother !" I cried, "my poor mother !"

The Superior knit his brows. "My son," said he, in a stern voice, "you cannot serve God and the world at the same time. Destined to the altar, you must, without a murmur, tear from your heart all the sentiments that are common to other men. . ."

"Alas !" murmured my father, "and yet Our Lord loved His mother, the Holy Virgin," and he turned to leave—my fate was sealed.

THE END

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